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THE PROBLEM OF FRENCH INDIA

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THE PROBLEM OF FRENCH INDIA

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THE JAIPUR CONGRESS RESOLUTION

ON

FOREIGN POSSESSIONS IN INDIA

The chequered course of India's history during the last two hundred years or more has left certain foreign possessions in various parts of the country. These foreign possessions continued for this long period because India herself was under alien domination. With the establishment of independence in India the continued existence of any foreign possession in India becomes anomalous and opposed to the conception of India's unity and freedom. Therefore it has become necessary for these possessions to be politically incorporated in India and no other solution can be stable or lasting or in conformity with the will of the people. The Congress trusts that this change will be brought about soon by peaceful methods and the friendly cooperation of the Governments concerned. The Congress realises that during this long period administrative, cultural, educational and judicial systems have grown up in these foreign possessions, which are different from those prevailing in the rest of India. Any change-over therefore must take these factors into consideration and allow for a gradual adjustment which will not interfere with the life of the people of the areas concerned. The Congress would welcome the present cultural heritage of these possessions to be continued, in so far as the people of those possessions desire, and for a measure of autonomy to be granted, wherever possible, so as to enable the people of those possessions to maintain their culture and institutions within the larger frame-work of free India.

NOTE

The problem of French India has, we regret to say, not received the attention of the Indian public which it deserves. The people of French India have been complaining that we in India have very little knowledge about conditions in these areas and the difficulties under which nationalist groups function there under a reactionary colonial administration. There has been an insistent demand that the Indian National Congress should discharge its duty in this respect by acquainting the people of India with the real facts of the situation as it exists. It is in response to that demand that this small book is being published. It is a plain and unvarnished tale uninfluenced by sentiment, which in this case is particularly strong so far as Indians are concerned. I have throughout depended upon reliable and authoritative sources for the facts and figures given here wherever such information is not the result of my personal observation or experience. Dealing as we are with what is technically an international question, care has been taken to see that no unfounded allegation is made based on mere rumour or a distorted version of facts. We hope that the sequence of events narrated here and the inherent difficulties in solving this problem, would serve to focus public opinion in this country towards what is undoubtedly one of the most important tasks facing the Indian Republic.

26th January 1951
New Delhi

N. V. Rajkumar

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1

INTRODUCTION

The French Possessions in India have been giving us quite a headache in recent months. Liberty, Equality and Fraternity are supposed to be the corner-stones of French democracy. They are faith-inspiring words—eye-catching phrases. But they have no meaning in the context of the herculean efforts the French imperialists are making to retain their precarious hold over the tiny areas they have been able to secure in Indian territory at a time when India was down and out.

France has an agreement with India which recognises the historical, geographical and cultural identity of these settlements with the rest of India and which, in view of this, provides for a free choice to be given to the people of these areas to decide their future. The French Government have interpreted this to mean the conduct of a referendum to decide whether the people in these little pockets like to continue their association with France or not. This referendum is to be held under French auspices, *i. e.* under the control and supervision of the French Government alone. How such a referendum can be a fair and impartial one, particularly against the background of French Indian politics, is the problem we are up against.

A visit to the French Possessions in this country is always stifling to one who breathes the fresh air of free India. I have recently come back after my fifth visit to

Pondicherry and I can honestly say that conditions there are abnormal ; even more so now, in view of the contemplated referendum to decide their future. It is well-known that naked rowdyism is prevailing in these areas obviously tolerated by the authorities in their own interest. People live from day to day in fear of their lives and possessions. I have not witnessed such abject slavery and such demoralisation even in the worst days of British rule in India.

When I stated this publicly some time ago, M. Menard, the Governor of French India, vehemently denied it. But any one who knows anything about French India will, I am certain, bear me out in this matter. That rowdyism prevails in French India has almost become a copy-book maxim by now. It does not need any reiteration from me. Only, this rowdyism is now directed towards the suppression of all pro-Indian elements in view of the coming referendum.

All parties and groups in French India are definitely of the opinion that there is no use holding a one-sided referendum under the control and supervision of the French administration. They are certain that unless India has a say in the conduct of the referendum and it is held under the joint supervision of both the Governments, it will go in favour of the French for the simple reason that the people will either not vote at all or will be forced to vote for the continuance of French rule. Opinion is unanimous that Indian police must be present on the scene in order to infuse confidence and to ensure security to the people.

Public memory is proverbially short. Let me therefore switch back to the past and trace the history of this

referendum idea which has created so many difficulties for us today.

India's attitude on the question of the French and Portuguese Settlements in this country has been made crystal clear in the famous Jaipur Resolution of the Congress. In unequivocal terms, the Resolution has set forth free India's policy towards the continuance of foreign imperialism on patches of purely Indian territory. In the opening para, it says :—"With the establishment of independence in India, the continued existence of any foreign Possession in India becomes anomalous and opposed to the conception of India's unity and freedom. Therefore it has become necessary for these Possessions to be politically incorporated in India, and no other solution can be stable or lasting or in conformity with the will of the people. The Congress trusts that this change will be brought about soon by peaceful methods and the friendly cooperation of the Governments concerned." The Resolution goes on to assure the people of these territories that their future set-up in the Indian Union would be decided in consultation with them keeping in view the different political, administrative, judicial, educational and other practices obtaining there.

I do not think we could have posed the whole question in a better and more graceful manner. In simple but effective phraseology, it has been made clear to France and Portugal that it is impossible for India to tolerate their domination over the tiny areas that are in their possession today. We have made the British quit the major part of this country. Are we likely to keep quiet and allow the French and the Portuguese to remain ? We had hoped that when the British gave up their rule here, the French and

the Portuguese would also depart. It is a sad thing that they did not profit by the experience of the British and follow their footsteps.

We are a peaceful people and we want to settle this thing peacefully. If we are to adopt forcible methods, we could, I am sure, solve this problem in a matter of hours. But we have some regard for international morality as well as great faith in the purity of the means to achieve our ends. We do not desire to imitate the French and the Portuguese who grabbed this territory by sheer violence. We are resolved to get it back from its conquerors in a straightforward manner.

It is in pursuance of this policy that an agreement was arrived at between France and India on 8th June 1948, for the settlement of the future of the five French Possessions here, under which their future was to be referred to the people of those areas for decision. This was done because the French Government said that under Article 27 of their Constitution any transfer of French territory or any change in its status could be effected only after "consultation with the people". Under the terms of the collateral correspondence which took place between the Indian and French Governments, the latter interpreted this consultation to mean a referendum ; and the modalities of this referendum were to be decided by the Municipal Assemblies of the five Settlements for which fresh elections were to be held.

All this was apparently fair and above board. But it is only now that we realise the pitfalls in store for us. It is a well-known fact that there has never been a fair election in the history of French India. Elections have always been a mockery there. Might was right, and a

Four

handful of political bosses with their *goonda* followers, aided by the liberal use of money and liquor, could win them easily for themselves. If pro-French elements could be got elected to the Municipal Assemblies, it would then be easy to manipulate the referendum in favour of the French.

And this is what actually happened. Except in Chandernagore where the elections took place earlier and where the French could not muster any substantial support, the municipal elections that took place in the three Settlements in South India in October 1948 were, I am sorry to say, a mere sham. I was present in Pondicherry at that time and I know what happened. It was nothing but the prostitution of a democratic device. I need not say anything further on that point as it is now past history.

Much water has flowed under the bridge since then. In spite of Chandernagore's request for a settlement without the formality of a referendum, it was thrust upon the people of that town. They took up the challenge and on 19th June 1949 gave their verdict in favour of India by a 99 per cent majority. I was one of those who were privileged to witness the historic scenes that occurred in Chandernagore that day. It was a tremendous victory for India and it proved the old adage that blood is thicker than water.

Chandernagore's rebuff has had its repercussions in the other four Settlements, although of course, the French hope for a favourable result there. They had all along treated Chandernagore differently and had given it up as lost. In Pondicherry, Karikal, Mahe and Yanam, their own men are in power and they pin all their hopes on

them. They believe that these men would manage to win the ensuing referendum in favour of France by terrorising and bribing the voters. This is a distinct possibility and unless our Government are on the alert and insist on conducting the referendum under joint Indo-French auspices and supervision, I personally have little doubt about the results. If we concede the French claim to make it an internal affair, the referendum is as good as lost to us because there will be no fair referendum.

It will be a great tragedy if this were to happen. For, the great majority of the people of French India are with us and are in favour of integration with India. Only certain opportunists are against us; and they are against us not because they have any love or regard for France, but because they are afraid they might lose their advantages in a democratic India. I know what I am saying and I am speaking from first-hand experience of men and events there.

The spirit of the June (1948) agreement between India and France was a free consultation of popular opinion under impartial conditions; and if this is not possible now, that agreement is null and void and will naturally have to be scrapped. The best solution would be to enter into fresh negotiations on the basis of outright transfer of these areas to the Indian Union. In the alternative, the French can hand over charge to the local people and quit, following the good example of the British. This will, in any event, be preferable to the continuance of French rule over these scattered, but strategic spots of Indian territory.

I might have put things rather bluntly. I have done so because this is no time for mincing words and indulging

in constitutional niceties. This is a grave matter affecting the destinies of lakhs of fellow Indians as well as the prestige of our newly founded Republic. Our position is simply stated. We go ahead with the proposed referendum if we are assured of a fair deal. Otherwise we are not bound by the results of any referendum that may be conducted by the French, for it will be a unilateral decision. But as things stand, the proposed referendum is a clever ruse to deceive world opinion and to throw dust in the eyes of the Indian Government. It does not seem as if the French intend to quit India as the British have done. The time has therefore come to think out a fresh solution of this problem of clearing out the last vestiges of European hegemony over Indian soil.

2

WHAT ARE THE FRENCH SETTLEMENTS ?

Prevented by the Dutch from starting commercial establishments on any large scale in India in the 17th century, unsuccessful in their intrigues with local Indian potentates, out-manoeuvred by the British in politics and decisively defeated by them at the Battle of Wandiwash, the French were able to salvage for themselves five Settlements, besides a few market-places called *Loges*, as a result of the Treaty of Paris (1673). The *Loges* entirely surrounded by Indian territory, where the French exercised trading rights, were formally ceded to the Indian Union on 6th October, 1947.

The French Establishments in India consist of Pondichery, Karikal, Mahe, Yanam and Chandernagore. The first four are in the State of Madras : Pondicherry, Karikal and Yanam on the Coromandel or East Coast and Mahe on the West Coast ; Chandernagore is in Bengal, 30 miles from Calcutta. With the exception of Chandernagore, the other four Establishments are situated near the sea-shore. (*See Map*). Chandernagore has since joined the Indian Union as the result of a referendum held in June 1949. It is however, legally still under France. The total area of the above Establishments is about 200 sq. miles. According to the census held in 1948, the total population is 362,045. The total budgetted receipts and expenditure for these colonial Settlements in the year 1951 were Rs. 7,220,000 and Rs. 7,795,000 respectively.

There are 67 primary schools where French and the local languages are taught. The following four institutions

Eight

are designated as Colleges : College Coloniale, Pondicherry ; College Calve, Pondicherry ; College Mahe de la Bourdonnais, Mahe ; College Dupleix, Chandernagore. The first is a French College, the second and third are Secondary Schools where English and French and Tamil or Malayalam are taught upto the Matriculation Course. The last is a Second Grade College where English, French and Bengali are taught upto the Intermediate Course. These educational institutions altogether employ about 390 teachers and have about 13,000 pupils.

The French Establishments in India are, like the rest of the country, mainly agricultural. The percentage of cultivated area is as follows : Pondicherry, 70% ; Karikal, 90% ; Mahe, 92% ; Yanam, 49%. Rice is the most important cultivation. Millets and coconuts come next. Karikal is the main centre for cultivation of rice and of coconut trees ; Pondicherry for millets and indigo ; Mahe for fruit trees. There is a botanical garden at Pondicherry, which is known as "Jardin Coloniale". There are three cotton mills at Pondicherry : (1) "Etablissement Textile de Modeliarpet" is an Indian concern, (2) "Anglo-French Textile Co. Ltd.," or "Rodier Mill" is an Indian concern, (3) "Societe Anonyme Savana" or "Savana Mill" is a French concern. There are about 1,980 looms and 85,376 spindles, employing about 8,000 labourers. There are about 6,968 handlooms in the Pondicherry area. "Saylas" is the name of the cloth usually produced. There are seven oil refineries—Krimens, Gaudart and Fils, Arul, Muthu-Alagananda, Jothi, National and Krishna. There is one bone-mill named the Bharath Manure Works. Country liquor, such as arrack, is manufactured at the Government Distillery and distributed for use in certain

areas of Pondicherry. Indian made foreign liquors such as Rum and Curacao are produced by the same distillery. There are several rice mills at Karikal and some rice is exported to Ceylon and Malaya. There is a jute mill at Chandernagore known as "Gondalpara Jute Mill" under the management of Messrs Gillanders Arbuthnot and Co., Calcutta. Tinned fish is prepared in Mahe. Yanam is reputed for pickles.

The value of the import trade of Pondicherry and Karikal are as follows : Pondicherry Rs. 12,928 ; Karikal Rs. 51,260. The export trade is negligible. The trade movement of the French Establishments in India is solely through the ports of Pondicherry and Karikal. With the exception of cotton yarn and cloth manufactured at Pondicherry, these are mainly ports of transit, as the groundnuts which are exported through the port of Pondicherry are harvested in the adjoining districts of the Indian Union. There is a Chamber of Commerce in Pondicherry. The principal imports consist of tinned provisions, rice, sugar, arecanut, tobacco, wood, wines and spirits, cement, mineral-oil, colours and other chemical produce, cotton-yarn, cotton and jute cloth, silk, paper, machinery, etc. The principal exports consist of bone-powder, hides and skins, cotton yarn to Indo-China, pure cloth, silk, shelled groundnuts to France, etc., and onions to British Colonies. A Customs Convention between the Government of India and the Government of French India was signed on the 28th January 1941. The Customs Union with India which started functioning on 15th February 1941 expired on 31st March 1949. The Indian rupee is the ordinary tender in all the French territories ; but the local branch of the "Banque de l' Indo-Chine"

issues paper currencies of one rupee, five rupees and fifty rupees denominations under the authority of the French Government. Usually, these are legal tender only in Pondicherry as the people of the other Establishments prefer Indian currencies.

Pondicherry

The town of Pondicherry lies on the east coast adjoining the State of Madras in the District of South Arcot, 105 miles by road south of Madras, 14 miles north of Cuddalore and 24 miles by a branch line from the Villupuram Junction on the South Indian Railway. Pondicherry is the capital town of the French Establishments in India ; Pondicherry town and territory cover an area of 115 sq. miles, with a total population of 222,572 according to the census of 1948. The area is divided into 8 communes, or municipal divisions : Pondicherry, Ariankuppam, Bahoor, Mudaliarpet, Nettapakkam, Oulgaret, Tirubuvanai and Villianoor.

Pondicherry was founded in 1674 by Francois Martin. It was captured by the Dutch in 1693 but was restored in 1699. It was besieged by the British four times : by Major Lawrence and by Admiral Boscawen in 1748 ; by Colonel Eyrecoote in 1760 who captured it on the 17th January 1761; subsequently fortress, ramparts, public buildings, etc., were destroyed under the orders of Lord Pigott, Governor of Madras ; besieged again by Sir Hector Munro in 1778, Pondicherry capitulated ; and when besieged and captured for the last time by Colonel Braithwaite in 1793, the remnants of the old fortifications were destroyed. According to the Treaty of Paris signed on the 30th May 1814, Pondicherry was restored to the French in 1816 under

the condition that the French Government would not raise any fortification in the Establishments and would have only the number of troops required for maintenance of law and order or in other words, for doing police duty.

The Indian Post-and Telegraph Department maintains Post and Telegraph Offices in all the five French Establishments in India and there is also a Town Exchange at Pondicherry. Electricity is supplied to Pondicherry from the Mettur Hydro-electric Power System in India. The local language is Tamil.

It is of interest to note that Pondicherry is by no means a compact area. Its territory is not continuous or even contiguous. Out of the eight communes into which it is divided, four are enclaves surrounded on all sides by Indian territory and cut off from the rest. (*See Map*). If therefore India were not a friendly country and were to treat the French Possessions as foreign territory in reality, these communes, which form the bulk, physically and economically, of the Capital of French India, would be in a serious predicament and would not be able to exist even for a day. There are several cases where the front of a house is in Indian territory with the backyard under French occupation. Such is the close contact and association of these Settlements with the Indian Union.

Karikal

Karikal also lies on the east coast adjoining the State of Madras in the District of Tanjore, about 10 miles north of Negapatam and 6 miles south of Tranquebar. A branch line

Twelve



TERRITORY OF PONDICHERRY

THIS MAP SHOWS HOW THE EIGHT COMMUNES OF PONDICHERRY ARE CLOSELY INTERMINGLED WITH THE INDIAN UNION AREA.

connects Karikal with Peralam on the South Indian Railway. The town and territory of Karikal cover an area of 53 sq. miles and has a population of 70,541 people. The country is very fertile being irrigated by seven branches of the Cauvery. There are six communes or municipal divisions viz : Karikal, -Grande Aldee, Nedungadu, Cotchery, Neravy and Tirunallar.

The territory of Karikal was ceded to the French by Sahoji, Raja of Tanjore, for 50,000 chakras; but subsequently, he was reluctant to its being occupied by them. Chanda Sahib, one of the sons-in-law of Dost Ali, Nawab of the Carnatic, who had taken possession of Trichinopoly and was besieging Tanjore, and who was, in his own interest, in close touch with the French Governor Dumas, helped the latter to take possession of Karikal. Besieged and captured several times by the British, Karikal was finally handed over to the French by the Treaty of Paris in 1814. The people are wholly Tamil speaking. Karikal is under a French Administrator subordinate to Pondicherry.

Mahe

Mahe is on the west coast adjoining the Madras State in the District of North Malabar and 6 miles by road to the south of Tellicherry. It is on the main line of the S. I. Rly. It covers an area of 22.85 sq.miles and has a population of 18,293. By a treaty signed on the 2nd April 1721, the Raja of Badagara ceded to the French land near the mouth of the river Mahe with right to keep a garrison therein. The French were however forced to leave it temporarily for their *loge* in Calicut by the above Prince; but it was recaptured by La Bourdonnais in 1725. The

possession of this territory by the French was confirmed by a Peace Treaty between the French and the Raja of Badagara signed on 8th November 1726. After the fall of Pondicherry on 17th January 1761, Mahe was surrendered to Major Hector Munro on 13th February of the same year; but it was restored on 20th May 1763 by the Treaty of Paris signed on 10th February 1763. After the capitulation of Pondicherry on 17th October 1778, Mahe capitulated on 11th March 1779 to General Munro (later Sir Hector Munro) but was again restored to the French on 22nd February 1817. Mahe is under a French Administrator subordinate to Pondicherry. The local language is Malayalam.

Yanam

Yanam is again on the east coast in the District of East Godavary (Madras State) 18 miles south of Kakinada. It covers an area of 5.5 sq. miles and has a population of 5,853 souls. It is under an Administrator, held temporarily by an official either of the Health or Judicial Department. The French created a "Comptoir" at Yanam in 1731 and the sovereignty of the territory was confirmed in 1750 by Muzzafar Jung, Nizam of Hyderabad. The people speak Telugu.

Chandernagore

Chandernagore is situated on the bank of the Hoogly, a short distance below Chinsura in the State of Bengal, 30 miles by road north of Calcutta. It covers an area of 3.5 sq. miles and has a population of 44,786. The "*Comptoir d'Hoogly*" was formed by M. Duplessis, Chief of the French *Loge* of Balasore, with the permission of the Moghul

Viceroy in Bengal, near the Portuguese quarters; but was transferred in 1690 by Bouleau Deslandes to the present site of Chandernagore, which Duplessis had obtained in 1674 on the bank of the Hoogly. The construction of walls, good buildings and of many godowns was started at once. Dupleix was appointed Director of the "Comptoir" which produced a large variety of goods. Dupleix availed of the proximity of Chandernagore to Delhi to obtain many favours from the Moghul. Chandernagore is on the East Indian Railway.

At present Chandernagore is a quiet suburban town with little external trade. Most of the inhabitants work in Calcutta. By a decree of 7th November 1947, Chandernagore was given certain municipal powers under the authority of the Governor of these Establishments. It has been placed under the management of a Council of Administration and an elected Municipal Assembly. The Administrator is known as the '*Delegue*'.

Administration

The administration of the French Establishments in India are vested in a Governor, now called the Commissioner of the Republic, who is appointed by the metropolitan government in Paris. The Commissioner's residence is in Pondicherry. He is assisted by a Government Council consisting of six members created by the decree of the 12th August 1947 and by several "*Chefs de Service*" in the different administrative departments.

Representation in the French Parliament is as follows :

(1) A member of the National Assembly, Paris, who is known as "*Depute*", is elected by the voters of the French

Establishments in India, (2) One member of the Council of the Republic, Paris, who is called "*Senateur*", is elected by the French India Representative Assembly ; (3) One member of the Assembly of French Union elected by the members of the Representative Assembly.

The Representative Assembly of French India came into being on 6th January 1947 and replaced the former "*Conseil General*" and cancelled the "*Conseil Local*". It consists of 44 members elected by universal suffrage as under : Pondicherry, 22; Karikal, 12; Chandarnagore, 5; Mahe, 3; Yanam, 2. Any new taxation or legislation proposed by the Assembly cannot be brought into force unless they have been approved by the Minister for Overseas Territories.

By decrees of the 12th and 20th August 1947, the Administration of French India is conducted by a Government Council consisting of the Governor as President and six members, of whom at least three are elected by the Representative Assembly and the others nominated by the Governor at his discretion. The members of the present Council were all elected by the Representative Assembly. The Presidentship of the Government Council can be delegated by the Governor to one of the Members of the Council. Reports from Heads of Departments can be heard by the Government Council after obtaining previous sanction of the Governor. The Government Council is to follow the resolutions of the Representative Assembly. It can discuss the draft orders of the Governor except those passed in order to put laws into effect. The Governor may, by an order, invest a member of the Council with responsibility for a Department, whose entire budget is met by the local Finance Department. The member so invested

receives delegated powers from the Governor to administer that department with the technical help of the chief official in charge of it. The Heads of Department are paid by France. Their salaries amount to Rs. 5 lakhs approximately.

The five Settlements are divided into 17 communes the interests of which are looked after by 17 Municipal Councils—eight in Pondicherry, six in Karikal and one each in Mahe, Yanam and Chandernagore. Each Municipal Council elects a Mayor and two or three assistant Mayors from the members of the Council. The Mayor is expected generally to see to the proper publication of laws and to their execution and to assist the Departments of the Government concerned in their task. In this respect, the Mayor takes the executive responsibility of the Governor so far as his Commune is concerned. The Mayor also frames, on the resolutions of the Municipal Assembly, laws and rules affecting his Commune, (pertaining mainly to the public health and maintenance of public order), subject to the approval of the Governor.

The powers exercised by the Government may be classified into three : The Legislative or Constitutional power is vested in (a) The National Assembly and the Council of the Republic in France, as regards legislation concerning the whole of the French Empire ; (b) The Representative Assembly of the French Establishments in India, as regards legislation in so far as the Colony as a whole is concerned ; (c) The Municipal Council as regards municipal matters within the Commune. The Executive power is vested in (a) The President of the Republic, for the Empire as a whole ; (b) The Governor of the Colony, so far as the Colony is concerned ; (c) The Mayor

of the Commune. The Judicial power is vested in (a) Minister of Justice in France and Colonies ; (b) The Governor, so far as the personnel of the department is concerned; (c) The *Procureur General* so far as the administration of Justice in the Colony is concerned.

The Upper and Lower House in France viz: "*Conseil de la Republique*" and "*Assemblée Nationale*" enact the law; the President of the Republic applies it by means of a "*Decret*", which is promulgated by the Governor in order to make it applicable to the French Establishments in India. The Mayor sees to its publication and execution.

The Governor is vested with the power to administer the budget voted by the Representative Assembly and approved by the Minister for Overseas in France. Payment is made at the Treasury on presentation of bills (*mandats*) or payment orders issued by the Finance Secretary. Recovery of taxes and other revenues assessed by the "*Chef du Service des Contributions*" is made by the "*Tresorier-Payeur*" through "*Percepteurs*", "*Agents de recettes*", "*Huissiers*" and "*Agents de poursuites*".

The Budget falls under the following main heads :

Receipts from the Government of India :	Rs. 6,52,500
Receipts from Alcohol, Opium, Ganja, etc.:	Rs. 22,20,700
Other sources :	Rs. 47,99,920

Total : Rs. 76,73,120

To this figure however, should be added the sum of Rs. 5,00,000 representing the salaries of the Governor, the Administrators, the Magistrate and the European staff of the Armed Forces (*Forces Publiques* and *Gendar-*

Eighteen

merie), which are borne by France and are not shown in the Budget.

The Police Department is a branch of the Armed Forces, commanded usually by an officer not above the rank of Major (*Chef d' Escadron*) who is appointed by the Minister of War. The actual strength of the French Police of the five French Establishments in India in the year 1948 was 672 as detailed below :—

<i>Grades</i>	<i>No. of Reserves (Red Caps)</i>	<i>No. of Locals (Blue Caps)</i>	<i>Total</i>
1. European Officers	2	1	3
2. European NCO's	8	9	17
3. Indian NCO's	57	55	112
4. Men (Sepoys and recruits)	271	269	540
	<hr/>	<hr/>	<hr/>
Total :	338	334	672

These Forces are distributed as follows :—

1. Pondicherry territory	447	
2. Karikal „	153	
3. Mahe „	15	
4. Chandernagore „	43	(Since withdrawn)
5. Yanam „	14	
	<hr/>	
Total :	672	
	<hr/>	

The Military Forces of French India may be compared with the “Reserve Police” in the Republic of India. They are to respond to orders from the Governor through the Commandant to maintain law and order. The Police branch of the Armed Forces is subject to military

discipline. A Colonial Service French Engineer is in charge of the Public Works Department. The Head of Public Health Department is a French Military Medical Officer. He is assisted by two others who are appointed by the Ministry of Health. The medical officers who are recruited and trained locally are designated as "*Medecin Local*". The Judicial machinery consists of a "*Chef du Service Judiciaire*", the two courts of the Justice of the Peace, two Tribunals of First Instance and one of "*Tribunal Superieur d' Appel*".

It is abundantly clear from the above description that both the Council of Ministers and the Assembly are severely restricted in their powers. The system of universal suffrage, on which so much praise was showered some time back by the French Ambassador in India, M. Levi, is so carefully hedged in and manipulated as to permit only loyal interests to assume power. The entire territory is divided into 17 Municipalities through which, directly or indirectly, the administration makes its power felt. France gets little material advantage from the possession of these tiny bits of land thousands of miles away from her. But their existence is a matter of some prestige and gives her international importance as a Colonial Power. At best these Settlements serve as not very useful markets for cheap French goods and as ports through which French manufactures can be smuggled across into Indian territory.

India's Relations With These Settlements

Not many people know how much French India is dependent on the Indian Union. During the days of British rule, French India was given the status of an

honoured guest and the same policy is being continued even today by the Government of India. We run their railways, their post offices and their customs and pay them a subsidy for doing this work for their benefit. The payments made by the Government of India to the French India Government under various conventions and agreements, total up to the huge sum of about Rs. 12 lakhs annually. In addition, we provide them with a long list of supplies and services at cost. These include paddy, wheat, pulses, petrol, coal, kerosene-oil, fuel oil, cloth and yarn, firewood, iron and steel, groundnut, manure and fertilisers, sugar, paper, jaggery and molasses, road materials, electricity for lighting and industrial purposes, coffee, cement and machine parts. We also give them water for irrigation. The Government of India have continued these supplies in the face of acute shortage in the Indian Union solely because of their solicitude for the people of French India. Thus it will be seen that French India depends on us for its very existence. That they cannot stand by themselves, one who runs may see.

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THE INDO-FRENCH AGREEMENT OF JUNE 1948.

The attainment of independence by India has brought the question of the continued existence of these foreign Settlements to the forefront. It is obvious that we cannot permit the presence of these pockets in our midst in the interests of security. Besides, it would be illogical for India, as a staunch opponent of colonialism everywhere, to tolerate the continuance of foreign rule on her own soil. But above all, there is the desire of the overwhelming majority of the people in French India to reunite with their brethren in the Indian Union. In fact, but for the intervention of India's leaders, the people of French India would have decided the issue of merger in August 1947 itself. There was at that time such a tremendous upsurge in all the five Establishments that the French administration seemed helpless to do anything. Governor Baron flew to Calcutta where Gandhiji was then staying and had a long interview with him. The next day Mahatma Gandhi called upon the people of French India not to take the law into their own hands. He pointed out that Pandit Nehru had actively supported the freedom of Indonesia and that he would certainly not neglect his own kith and kin in the foreign outposts in India. It was thus, on Gandhiji's personal intervention that the agitation in French India was stopped. Immediately after, the French Government announced certain illusory political reforms in the five Settlements.

Some time later, our Government publicly announced that negotiations with the French Government over the future of these areas were in progress. The Indian National Congress thereupon called upon the people of French India to be patient for a little while until the issue could be settled by mutual agreement. We must say in fairness to them that they promptly complied with our request and stayed their hands.

In June 1948, the terms of an agreement between the Indian and French Governments to settle the future of these Settlements were announced. It was agreed that the future status of the French territories should be left to the decision of the people concerned, their wishes being ascertained by means of a referendum. The date and other details of this consultation was to be decided by the Municipal Councils of the five Settlements. As a preliminary to this, fresh elections were to take place to all the Municipal Councils.

The text of the French declaration and relevant excerpts from the letters exchanged in connection with it are given below :

Declaration made on June 8 by the French Government to the Parliament in Paris concerning French India.

“United to France by several centuries of history, the populations of the French Establishments have been the first in the Indian Peninsula to benefit by democratic institutions. Already for a century, they have been called upon to designate themselves their local representation, and, with French citizenship fully open to them, also to designate their representatives to the metropolitan

parliament. Thus, they have a long and full experience of democracy.

The reforms which have been introduced (in French India) and which are progressively being put into force, tend to place the administration of these Establishments on their own elected representatives.

Account had to be taken of the fact that these different communities constitute distinct groups, whose quite particular conditions had to be taken into special consideration.

Integrated for a long time past in the French community, these Establishments at the same time share in many respects the general activity of the regions of India in which they are respectively located. Thus, related at the same time to France and India, these populations were bound to feel attracted both to one and the other and to follow from time to time the varying inclinations of their affinities and traditions.

In view of this situation, which is without parallel in the entire French Union, and convinced moreover that those Establishments should in any case constitute the future links between France and the Indian Union, the French Government solemnly declares that it intends to leave to the populations of the French Establishments in India themselves, the right to pronounce their future fate and future status.

Their decision will be taken by means of a free and sincere consultation, the particulars of which will be fixed in agreement with the elected Municipal Councils of each of these Establishments and at a date which will be fixed

according to their indications. The results of this consultation will hold good for each of the five Establishments separately and not globally for the whole.

Until then, the French Government intends that peace and order should be maintained in these Establishments and that religious and racial equality and the freedom of the individual should be fully assured. It places its confidence in this respect in the populations to which France has transmitted the principles promulgated for the entire universe by the Declaration of the Rights of Man.

It intends that this consultation shall not give rise to any display of passion or hatred between one section of opinion and another before, during or after this consultation, and that it shall not be interfered with or perverted by any pressure, internal or external, contrary to the spirit of a true democracy.

Towards the people and the Government of friendly India, the French Government desires to bring a just and humane solution of a complex problem in a spirit of understanding and comprehension”.

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Extract from a letter dated 29th June 1948, from H. E. the Ambassador for France in India to the Prime Minister and Minister for External Affairs, Government of India.

“I have the honour to inform you that my Government, following the exchange of views held recently with the

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Indian Government, has made a declaration on June 8 in the National Assembly.

The date of the consultation will be fixed for Chander-nagore by the Municipal Assembly of the Free Town ; for the four other Establishments by their Municipal Councils grouped in one single assembly. To this end, these Municipal Assemblies will be entirely renewed ; new elections will be held, the dates of which will be fixed as soon as possible.

The formalities of this consultation will be determined in agreement with the Municipal Assembly for Chander-nagore and for the four other Establishments, by the assembly grouping their Municipal Councils."

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Extract from a letter dated 29th June 1948, from the Prime Minister and Minister for External Affairs, Government of India, to H. E. the Ambassador of France in India.

"My Government note with satisfaction that the principles embodied in the Declaration are in agreement with their view that the future of the French Establishments in India should be determined at the earliest opportunity in accordance with the freely expressed desire of their inhabitants. They also agree with the provisions mentioned in the last two paragraphs of your letter regarding the functions to be performed by the newly-elected municipal assemblies.

My Government cordially share the French Govern-

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ment's desire that the referendum by which the people of French India are to be consulted should be held in an atmosphere free from passion or hatred and without the application of internal or external pressure."

Thus both Governments agreed that neither would, in any way apply any pressure, internal or external, direct or indirect, upon the people to influence them one way or the other. It was also understood that the arrangements for the holding of the referendum would be mutually agreed to. The process of ascertaining the wishes of the people was to be as follows : Firstly, to hold fresh municipal elections in all the five Settlements. Secondly, to call a meeting of the Municipal Assembly of Chandernagore and of the combined Assemblies of the other four Settlements to set the date for the referendum. The two Assemblies would also suggest to the French Government the modalities of the referendum.

This agreement was not to the liking of the people of French India who insisted on immediate and unconditional merger ; they considered a referendum an insult to their self-respect and sense of patriotism. However, out of respect for our national leaders who had agreed to this procedure, they fell in with their wishes in this matter. It may be pointed out here that, under this agreement, Chandernagore was treated as a special case.

THE MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS OF OCTOBER 1948

Accordingly, municipal elections were held in Chandernagore in August 1948 and went off more or less peacefully. The Congress Karma Parishad, an organisation sponsored by Bengal Congressmen, won 22 out of the 24 seats in the Chandernagore Municipality. The Parishad had earlier stated its policy as one of merger with India.

The elections to the Municipalities in the other four Settlements in the South were announced to be held on 10th October. But early in October the Foreign Department of the A.I.C.C. began to receive reliable reports from these places of the plans of the French India authorities and their henchmen to manipulate the impending municipal elections there to suit their interests. The matter was immediately brought to the attention of the Government of India. The A.I.C.C. secretariat suggested publicly in a Press Communique that these elections should be postponed and that the French Government should agree to have official observers at the time of elections in all the four places.

The Communique said : *“Municipal elections in the four southern French settlements in India are due to be held on October 10. Meanwhile we have received reports of attempts by certain anti-Indian elements, particularly the communists and the so-called French Indian Socialist party, to manipulate these elections and ultimately to serve their own ends. In Karikal, for example, these reactionary groups are making full use of the goonda elements in*

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suppressing the progressive forces which are all for merger with the Indian Union. The ignorant Muslim community is being pitted against the Hindus and made a pawn in the usual game of imperialist politics.

The object of all these questionable tactics is obviously to keep the French Indian territories safe for French imperialism. The agreement which our Government have reached with France is based on an honourable understanding regarding plebiscite and free election and has to be carried out in an honourable manner. The agreement is valueless if the French authorities do not take prompt and active steps to ensure fair elections and subsequently a fair plebiscite.

The Indian National Congress, representing as it does the will of the Indian people, cannot stand idly by when insidious attempts are being made to keep away from a part of the population the fruits of India's newly-won freedom. French India is in every respect a part of India, and the people there are our own kith and kin. It is for them to decide their future, and left to themselves they would presumably vote for integration with India.

It is clear that in the disturbed atmosphere which exists at present in the French Settlements, no fair elections are possible. The least that the French authorities can do in these circumstances is to order the postponement of these elections to a later date when proper arrangements can be made to ensure that no undue pressure is brought to bear on these peaceful people to vote in a particular manner. Judging from the events that have happened, we feel it is essential that the French Government should agree to have some Observers from India at the time the elections come

off. We hope the French Government would voluntarily agree to this procedure as it is in their interests to avoid the possibility of a charge of manoeuvred elections later.

The people of French India today are depressed and fearful. To them and to all those elements in Karikal, Pondicherry and elsewhere which are truly fighting for integration of the French Indian Settlements with the Indian Union, the Congress sends its greetings and assures them its full moral support. We hope the day will soon come when there will be no foreign domination in any part of the country and when all India will be an integrated whole."

In the meantime, the Government of India also moved in the matter and requested the French Government to postpone the elections. Public opinion rallied to our support to such an extent that the French had to give in. They announced that they were postponing the elections to a later date "till an atmosphere of complete security was restored". The question of having Observers to supervise the elections then came to the forefront. The Government of India proposed this to the French Government, and at one time it looked as if the French would agree to the stationing of Observers at all the polling stations, as a result of the intervention of Pandit Nehru who was then in Paris. The French Indian authorities then announced that the postponed elections would be held on the 24th October. This made the question of having Observers more urgent than ever. It was decided tentatively that the Congress should send some non-official Observers in case the French did not agree to the posting of official Observers by our Government. On the 21st October, however, the Government of India in a Press Communique announced that negotiations in this respect had failed.

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The A.I.C.C. office thereupon issued an official Press Note as follows : *"In spite of our best efforts to get the municipal elections in French India postponed, the French Government has decided to hold them on the 24th instant. In response to several representations we have been receiving from individuals and organisations in French India, the Indian National Congress is sending its representatives to the four French settlements to watch the situation there during the elections. Dr. P. Subbarayan, ex-Minister of Madras and Dr. N. V. Rajkumar, Secretary, Foreign Department, A.I.C.C., are going to Pondicherry, while one or two representatives will be sent by the Tamilnad, Kerala and Andhra Provincial Congress Committees to the other three places, viz, Karikal, Mahe and Yanam."* Accordingly Shri Jagannath Raju of Bhimavaram and Shri Saminatha Chettiar of Tanjore were deputed to go to Yanam and Karikal respectively and to watch and report on the elections in these two places. Subsequent events in Mahe made it unnecessary to send any Observer there.

Before I left for Pondicherry I had a talk over the trunk telephone with the Congress President, Dr. Rajendra Prasad who was then at Pilani. In an inspiring message to the people of French India which he conveyed through me, he said : *"I fully appreciate the difficulties under which nationalistic elements are functioning in these foreign Settlements. I also know that powerful reactionary forces are working for the defeat of pro-Indian and pro-merger groups. In spite of all this, I would appeal to all voters in Pondicherry, Karikal, Mahe and Yanam who have the welfare of India at heart to have faith in the high destiny of our country and to give their wholehearted support to those candidates who favour re-union with India. Their*

success will be a prelude to the success of the plebiscite that is coming, which will decide the future of these foreign pockets."

Dr. Subbarayan and myself reached Pondicherry on the morning of the 23rd October. En route, the people of French India showed their affection and loyalty to their mother country by giving us vociferous receptions at way side stations. But before I deal with the events that took place on the election day, I would like to draw a picture of the political groups and personalities in the French Indian capital.

Politics in French India

Elections come and go. But French India politics remains a muddle. It is a curious medley of discordant views, strange illusions and tremendous irresponsibility. There are two main groups in Pondicherry—those who are for union of the Settlements with India and are openly working for it and those who are obviously supporting French rule. The first group stands for immediate reunion with India. They do not mince words. They want unconditional merger. Neither personalities, nor problems, nor vested interests count with them. We are part of India, they say, and the French must quit. They have an ideal and they are sincerely fighting for it. But ideals do not count in French Indian politics where only liquor and bludgeon carry conviction. And so this group is organisationally weak although it has sincere leadership. The latter group, who call themselves the Socialist Party, are today in power in all the four settlements. It is led by Messrs. Goubaert and Muthu Pillay who are party bosses par excellence. *Goondas* are their mainstay. With the aid of money and liquor they can work wonders in

Pondicherry. This is how they won the elections. We were realiably informed while at Pondicherry that the administration had placed the colossal sum of about Rs. two lakhs at the disposal of this group for fighting the elections. It was rather amusing to hear from a trusted source that a very high official of the French India administration had privately warned the Socialist Party leaders that they should manag^e to give a few token seats to the nationalist group and thus avoid a cent per cent victory which would generate suspicion in the public mind. What a strange commentary on French morals ! The Socialist agents however ignored this friendly warning and arranged a cent per cent victory for themselves. These so called Socialists are just now sitting on the fence. So far as the merger issue is concerned they will jump on whichever side the landing ground is soft for them. They have the support of the French official class, the army pensioners and similar vested interests—the latest among them being the smugglers who have discovered their kingdom of heaven in French India. The pro-Indian group also consists of different sections and interests ; nevertheless they are united on the issue of merger with India. Political grouping in the other three Settlements does not differ very much from this pattern.

Election Arrangements in Pondicherry

The Municipal Council of Pondicherry has 102 seats—84 from the village communes surrounding Pondicherry and 18 from the Pondicherry town. 250 candidates contested the elections—84 from the French India Congress, 102 from the Socialist Party and 64 from Progressive Democrats. 96 polling stations, or *Bureaus* as they are called, were provided for. These *Bureaus* were

thatched sheds put up temporarily and they looked more or less like the toddy shops that could be seen everywhere. The shed was bare of all furniture except a table and a chair and in some places a bench. On the table was a square box, painted dark blue with white stripes into which the ballot papers were thrown. There was practically no secrecy of voting. On one side of the shed was hung a horizontal wooden or bamboo pole over which was draped a *chaddar*. This was supposed to ensure privacy. Within this enclosure were placed the ballot papers of the various parties. A voter has to produce his identification card, then enter this covered portion of the hut and take a ballot paper. The President, as the Officer-in-charge of the Polling Bureau is called, hands him a blue envelope. The voter has to put the ballot paper he has chosen in the envelope and deposit it in the ballot box. (Note : The ballot papers are printed by the parties themselves and made available to voters in the polling booth). The voters' lists were prepared years before and had not been corrected or brought up to date. Very reliable parties told us that it contained several irregular entries.

When we reached Pondicherry on the 23rd October, the atmosphere was more or less normal although we could sense a suppressed air of excitement. The Congress party feared the outbreak of violence. Our first object was to see that no violence was used during the elections. We therefore met the Governor Mr. C. F. Baron and the Socialist Party leaders and requested them to use their influence and good offices in this connection. They appeared to readily agree.

Almost the first complaint that was made to us, was about the improper distribution of voters' identification

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cards, the possession of which is necessary to exercise one's franchise. The arrangement was for the voters to come personally to the Mayor's office in Pondicherry and take their cards after establishing their identity. This could be done until the election day. It was alleged that many voters did not get their cards as several difficulties were placed in their way. When we asked the Mayor, Shri Muthu Pillay about it, he denied the charges and said that nearly 50% of the voters had already taken their cards and that those remaining could be claimed on the day of the election at the polling booths themselves. It was however not possible for us to check up on this.

Late in the evening on the 23rd October, at a reception given to us by the French India National Congress, we were told that the authorisation cards had not been issued to most of the assessors nominated by the Congress candidates. Under the French Indian electoral system, each booth will have four Assessors to assist the President of the booth. All the three parties contesting the elections were required to submit the names of their representatives who will act as Assessors. After scrutiny, the Government had announced the names on the 23rd. This complaint was a rather serious matter and was but the beginning of the whole tragic story of manipulations and abuses, which made the elections that followed an open farce. We immediately contacted the Mayor once again and brought this matter to his notice. He was a bit apologetic and after some arguments promised to do whatever he could at that late hour. But we found the next day that in most of the polling stations, there were no Assessors of the Congress party. They had been kept away from the *Bureau* by various dubious methods as we shall see

below. This was very important to the party in power in as much as they could, in the absence of Congress representatives, manage the voting as they liked.

Malpractices on Election Day

On the election day, we went round the polling booths in the town and in the surrounding villages. The first thing that we noticed was the very poor polling at almost every booth. With adult suffrage, one would have expected large queues forming before booths for casting their votes. But it was not so. In the town, there were little crowds near every booth consisting mostly of curious visitors and rough-looking individuals—presumably *goondas* posted by the party in power to intimidate the voters. These specimens of humanity did not differ much from those that usually swarm around liquor shops on a languorous evening. In the villages, the polling stations presented a deserted appearance. Everywhere, at the *Bureaus* or in the streets, women were conspicuous by their absence. Evidently word had gone round that there might be trouble and even respectable men had kept indoors. Police browbeating was evident. This suppressed feeling of intimidation in the air was itself very depressing to a stranger.

The “capture” of the polling booth was a phenomenon to which we were introduced for the first time in our lives. The procedure would have been quite enjoyable if it were not tragic beyond words. Polling is to start at 7 A. M. Supporters of the party in power turn up long before seven and take virtual possession of the polling booth. Assessors of the Congress Party, when they arrive at the appointed time, are curtly told that they are late and that the polling

booth has already been duly "formed". They are then ordered to leave the place. This leaves the booth in complete charge of the Socialist Party. The results of such a move may be imagined. In Bahour Commune, Polling Bureau No. 2, we were told by the Congress candidate that he has no hope of success as the Socialists had captured the booth and were manipulating results. Here the Congress Party assessor was beaten and was not allowed to enter the booth. By such questionable means, a large majority of the Congress Party agents who were duly given authorisation cards were turned away. This was, without doubt, one of the many causes for the defeat of the Congress.

One thing that struck us was the fact that the election rules in Pondicherry permitted the candidate himself to be the presiding officer at the polling booth. Apart from the significant fact that the Presidents of almost all the booths belonged to the Socialist Party, the Presidents in several cases were themselves candidates for election, *e. g.* in Divisions 16 and 17 of Pondicherry and Division 2 of Villianur Commune. In one case which we came across, the President of Division 17 stood from the same constituency as a Socialist candidate. The Mayor of Pondicherry, Shri Muthu Pillay, who was also a candidate, himself conducted the elections and it is only human that he should try to get candidates of his party returned to the Municipal Council.

One of the most reprehensible malpractices that was indulged in by the party in power, was to remove the ballot papers of the opposing parties from the booth. In Muthialpet Commune, Bureau No. 18, we found the

Congress ballot papers completely removed. When the President was questioned on the point he professed ignorance. This happened in several places, and in the absence of Congress representatives they could not be replaced. The ignorant voters were thus compelled to cast their votes for the Socialist Party.

In some of the booths, open voting was in progress. The Socialist Party supporters in charge of the booth openly thrust the party ballot papers into the voters' hands and made them vote as instructed. The nervous voter invariably agreed. In Division 16, the President of the booth was seen outside distributing his party ballot papers to the people gathered there. Protests were of no avail. There was a serious infringement of the electoral rules in Division 18 of Pondicherry which came to our notice. The Congress candidate there found out a few blue envelopes kept filled with Socialist Party ballot papers. The same thing happened in Division 15 of Pondicherry. We were later told that in some Divisions all the envelopes were kept filled with the ballot papers of the Socialist Party. In the 3rd Division of Ozhukarai Commune, the President frankly admitted similar practice and proceeded to show the envelopes to the visiting pressmen. The ballot papers inside belonged to the Socialist Party and the envelopes were handed over to voters who deposited them in the box in the presence of all. We heard that a similar thing happened in Division 8 of the same Commune.

There were several instances of misuse of voter's identity cards. In Division 15 of Pondicherry, one man was found with two cards. He said one was his and the other, that of his wife. The man was allowed to deposit



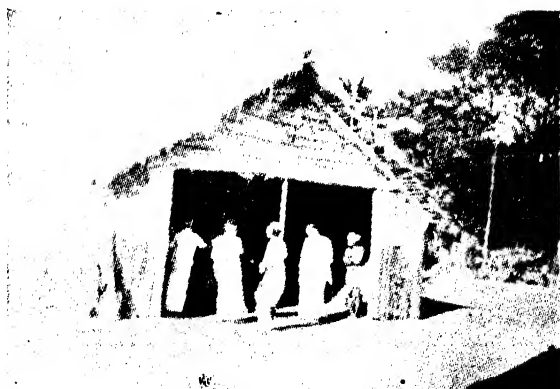
The three on the right are Socialist Party men.
They see that voters vote the 'right way'.



Polling scene. Ignorant voters being herded
by local bullies before being taken to the
polling booth.



**Polling Booth or Toddy Shop?
Both look alike.**



**Poor polling in villages— Empty Booth sign
of intimidation.**

two ballot papers by the President in spite of protest by the Congress Assessor. Here is another instance to which an accredited Press Correspondent was an eye witness. He reported to us that in Division 3, a voter had ten identification cards and was allowed to vote with all of them. The man said that the cards were those of the members of his family. The womenfolk, it seems, would not come out to vote and therefore he had taken upon himself the task of voting on their behalf. On examination it was revealed that three cards were in the names of women and the rest of men. One incident which we came across, was the case of some poor women voters who, when they came to claim their identity cards, were blandly told that they had already been taken away on their behalf by their menfolk. The women, already harassed, preferred to go away rather than argue with these presiding deities. I tried to probe into the matter further, when it was proved that the whole thing was a fraud and that somebody had misused the cards and cast all the votes for the Socialist Party on their behalf. Likewise there were also instances where cards had been given to non-voters deliberately. The Congress party objected to this strongly, but without any result. We were also told that liberal bribes of money and liquor were being given to the poorer voters by the Socialist Party to vote for them.

Although there was little sign of open violence, assaults and threats of assault were reported to us. On the eve of the elections, people from outlying Communes were not allowed by Communist hooligans to enter Pondicherry even for their normal work. It should be remembered in this connection that the French India administration have off and on, been showing a soft corner to the Communists

especially when they said they stood for continued French rule in the Settlements. We were told that the Government had even let out Communist prisoners from the jails in order to create trouble. Cases of beating were shown to us in which either the Socialists or the Communists were involved. A student leader was assaulted and he had a deep wound. A Congress candidate and member of the Working Committee of the French India National Congress, Shri Ananda Pathar, was beaten and he had a deep cut on his face which bled profusely. Of violence in the polling booth itself, we had one instance. In Bureau No. 2 of Ariankuppam Commune, the President came one hour late. He found a Congressman presiding over the booth in his absence. He was perfectly entitled to do this under the rules. The President, who is a Socialist Party man, however, forcibly entered the booth and with the help of the police, broke open the ballot box and threw away all the ballot papers inside. Among these were about 30 votes polled by the Congress. Lastly, we were told by a Congress lady candidate in the elections that she had received threatening letters asking her to withdraw from the contest.

The counting of ballot papers provided a real treat. In the evening, we went round the town to see the final stages of polling. According to the rules, polling booths had to be kept open up to 6 P. M., the counting of votes to take place after that. But in some booths polling had been declared closed and counting was over between 4-30 or 5-30 P. M. Even the record sheets to be submitted to the Government had been filled up and kept ready. This was a clear breach of the election law. It was reported to us by a pressman that one booth in the Ozhukarai Commune was empty and there were no ballot boxes at all

when he visited it at about 5-30 P. M. After 6 P. M. we went to a polling booth near the Indian Consulate. The counting process had begun in the gathering darkness with the aid of a single flickering kerosene lamp. It was evident that this too was a farce. It was very easy for the presiding officer to tamper with the ballot papers or to even destroy them wholesale. I am not imagining. Here is what happened in a Commune, where the Congress party is very strong and expected cent per cent success. Even the authorities considered this as a "Congress Commune". The local Congress leader, Mr. Perumal, assured us that almost all votes cast were in their favour. When however the results were announced, we found to our amazement that the Congress did not get even a single vote. Evidently all the votes cast in its favour were destroyed by the over-zealous agents of the group in power.

The law might be an ass, but not the French law. According to the election laws of France, the ballot papers as soon as they are counted, must be destroyed immediately. A very useful provision indeed in the context of French Indian election tactics ! No incriminating evidence would exist to prove the fraud practiced on the electorate. And so it was that on the evening of 24th October, 1948, innumerable bon-fires shot up to the sky and lapped up the ballot papers.

It was while we were witnessing the counting of votes as mentioned above, that we realised what an important role liquor played in the life and politics of French India. The whole atmosphere was reeking with the smell of liquor. A hostile crowd of drunkards surrounded us. It needed considerable persuasion and pressure on the part of a

policeman, who was posted there, to clear the mob. We beat a timely retreat so as to avoid a melee.

The description given above of the happenings on the election day in Pondicherry would, I hope, serve to give an idea of the kind of elections that actually took place. Many malpractices we saw for ourselves. More were reported to us by reliable witnesses. Information of any sort was refused to us at several of the polling booths and we were looked upon with suspicion by the supporters of the French administration. This made our task as Observers all the more difficult. Nevertheless we received substantial help and co-operation from the local population who were overwhelmingly sympathetic to our cause. Even French Indian policemen expressed to us their love for India and revealed to us where their real sympathies lay. The elections however proved conclusively how, under a facade of democracy, things were done in such a manner as to return to the Municipal Councils the party in power which is, to say the least, not quite sympathetic to the Indian cause. And the French Government had guaranteed fair and impartial elections in an official communique released on the 21st October !

When the results of the elections were announced, the Socialist Party reported cent per cent success—certainly a record for any party anywhere. The Congress was nowhere. This was natural because under the “List System” which was adopted, a party either wins all the seats or loses them all. There is no possibility of winning one seat and losing another. The former single member constituency system was given up in favour of the list system during these elections, with what object it is now clear.

Nobody wants a Referendum

On the morning of October 25, we met the Governor or the Commissioner of the Republic, Mr. C. F. Baron. The suave Frenchman that he is, he was all politeness. We gave our impressions of the elections to him and pointed out the several malpractices that took place. He pretended surprise and said he would take action if we gave specific cases. This was only talk, as nothing could be done then and we knew also that nothing would be done. We therefore left it at that. We then talked about the future. We told him that the existence of these foreign pockets is a matter of life and death for us. Their integration with India was essential to our security, apart from its being derogatory to our sovereignty and self-respect to permit a foreign power to occupy part of our coast-line. We also told him that a referendum, if held under the same conditions as the elections, would be a waste of efforts and would only result in charges of malpractices and possibly counter-charges without giving any tangible result. He agreed and said in so many words, that he was personally against a referendum and that he would certainly like the the issue to be settled amicably by mutual discussion. He suggested a conference for the purpose. He said the present elections had no importance whatsoever and they were fought on purely local issues. He gave us the impression that he would convey this proposal to his Government.

An interesting personality we met in Pondicherry was M. Laugenie who, it appears, was sent by the Paris Government to Pondicherry to be present at the time of the elections and to make a report of his observations to them. We were told that he had gone round the booths on

the election day and had seen things for himself. We told him what we had seen at the polling booths the previous day and our definite conclusion that the elections were not fair. He did not contradict us. He said he had also noticed many things and formed his own conclusions which he would convey to the Government at Paris. Talking about the future, he made what in our view was a very important statement. I give below the important points from M. Laugenie's statement to us : (1) These elections have not carried us any further towards the object we have in view. (2) Nor would a referendum solve the problem. Like elections it would give rise to ugly canvassing, unnecessary violence and intimidation and would leave behind an unpleasant trail of bitterness between India and France. (3) Therefore the idea of a referendum must be given up and fresh negotiations should take place. This might well be in the form of a tripartite conference between the representatives of India, France and French India. The whole future of the French Settlements in India should be decided finally at such a conference. Mr. Laugenie said that, while these were his personal views, he would convey them to the French Government and make recommendations accordingly. He said he was anxious that there should be perfect friendship and cordiality between our two countries and that the problem of these Settlements should not be permitted to come in the way of good relations between us. M. Laugenie, I understand, is now no more.

By the way, the Socialist Party leaders also told us that they were against a referendum to decide this problem, but would favour a representative conference instead to settle the question. They had a plan. It was in short as follows :

“The Representative Assembly, in its meeting on 3rd November 1948 and the newly-elected Municipal Councillors at their meeting on 25th November, 1948 will pass resolutions that the present agreement should be cancelled, the idea of referendum should be given up and a tripartite conference of the Government of India, the Government of France and the representatives of French India elected bodies, (i. e. the Municipal Councils of the French Settlements) should be called to decide the future of French India.” These meetings never took place and the idea was not followed up by the group in power for reasons best known to themselves.

Elections in Karikal

There was the same depressing story at Karikal. The first news about the elections there was received on the evening of the 24th October. The following telegram came from Shri Venkata Sabapathy Pillay, President of the Karikal National Congress :

“This morning at seven in most of the polling booths our duly nominated Assessors were violently thrown out and roughly handled. The order prohibiting the running of motor vehicles does not apply to those used by opponents. No security at all to Congress people. At this stage we have decided to boycott the elections.” That was that.

The Press reported several irregularities in the polling booths. In Karikal municipal area, in polling booths numbers 3, 5, 6, 8, 9 and 10, Congress Assessors, duly nominated by the Administrator of Karikal, were forcibly thrown out from their seats by Socialist Party men. Following this, trouble broke out in other polling booths

also. As the Mayor of Karikal, who is the authority to nominate voters' identification card distributors, was himself a candidate, he appointed men of his choice for distributing identification cards. Hence cards were not properly distributed and many voters were not able to exercise their votes on the election day. Further, there was no secrecy of voting. The house of Mr. Bhaskaran, a Congress worker, was attacked and stones were pelted on him. In Neravy Commune, Congress Assessors were not allowed to sit in polling booths Nos. 1, 2, 3, 4. In booth No. 6 where Congress Assessors were allowed to sit till 6 P. M., one police official and two constables came to the booth and in their presence two cars came there and took away the ballot box and the polling officers to the Municipal House where, it is alleged, the election report was drawn up and the President of the booth was forced to sign the report. In booth 5, the ballot box containing votes in favour of the Congress candidate was alleged to have been tampered with.

In Tirunallar area, however, where Mr. T. Filatriau, Chief Secretary to the Government, was the Municipal President appointed by the Government, the election was carried out constitutionally. The Congress candidates won all the seats there. This is significant.

Shri A. M. Saminatha Chettiar, who was observing the elections on behalf of the A. I. C. C. stated that in most of the polling booths in Karikal Commune, Congress Assessors were violently thrown out and insulted by members of the opposing parties. The latter used motor vehicles while Congress members were prevented from using these.

M. Joseph Carnot, Deputy Mayor, who stood as a

Congress candidate in the municipal elections and who was appointed by the Mayor of Karikal as a polling officer in booth No. 2, in a statement said *"I presided over the booth which met constitutionally with two Socialist Assessors and two Congress Assessors. The police were not present. One private individual brought the ballot box. Immediately, the public entered the booth and it became difficult to eject them. Till 8 o' clock the municipal employees who ought to deliver the undelivered identification cards did not turn up. The public became impatient and began to crowd into the booth. Fearing untoward incidents, the Congress Assessors left their seats. The identification card distributor, who came at 8 o' clock, informed those present that, as out of 376 cards for the booth 275 had not been delivered, he would sit in a nearby place and distribute them. According to the rules he must be at the entrance of the booth. He indiscriminately distributed the cards to whomsoever he liked, and so real identification became impossible. As three Assessors were not in their seats, the fourth Assessor, Rangappa Chettiar suggested that I might also leave the place as otherwise untoward incidents may take place. As there was no police and security, I left the booth at 10 o' clock this morning and came home. I made a full report of the above to the Administrator of Karikal."*

Reviewing the incidents which occurred during the municipal elections, the Karikal National Congress in a bulletin stated: *"Two Congress candidates of this Settlement were today taken into police custody and many Congress workers were roughly handled at the polling booths. In one polling booth, where the Congress candidate was manhandled, the police did not intervene although the police station was within two yards. About 15 persons assaulted a Congress candidate in another booth."*

Although the Administrator has formally nominated Congress Assessors for polling booths, when they proceeded to the booths this morning, they were forcibly pushed out and manhandled when they offered resistance and wanted justice. In many booths, police were not present. Many Indian Union citizens who were at Karikal were also taken into custody. When Congress leaders brought the incidents to the notice of the Government authorities, they denied any such occurrence. Although the running of cars was prohibited, cars were allowed to ply freely by our opponents, and when this was brought to the notice of the Government the authorities dismissed this as not true. While Congress was granted only 25 gallons of petrol for election, their opponents were freely given petrol. The Government prohibited the use of loud-speakers even within the Congress premises. Our opponents have resorted to violence because the general public is in favour of the Congress. Terrorism coupled with violence forced Congress and their supporters to boycott the elections."

In the face of these instances of violence and interference with free voting, there was little doubt as to who would win. When the election results were announced, out of 74 seats, 64 had been won by the Socialist Party and 10 by the Congress. The ten seats won by the Congress Party were from localities where there was no official interference and where, therefore, people voted freely.

Yanam

As for events in little Yanam, let Shri G. Jagannadharaju, who was present on the scene as an Observer on behalf of the A.I.C.C. tell the story. Here is the report he submitted to us :

Forty-eight

“French Yanam has a population of about 6,000 but the voting strength is only 1,500. Only adult members (either males or females) of a family which was domiciling in French Yanam in the year 1874 are qualified to vote and no others. The municipal area is divided into 12 wards and each ward is to elect its own representative. The election on 24-10-48 was with regard to the 12 seats constituting the Municipality.

K. Veeraswamy, President of the French National Congress Party, was interviewed by me and he stated that a few days prior to the elections, the Indian Union Flag, hoisted by him at his house, was forcibly removed and himself and his supporters were threatened by French Police with danger to their lives and property, if they were to organise a party and contest the ensuing elections on the French Congress ticket. On the date in question, he was keeping in-doors for fear of his life. There was therefore no contest on behalf of the French National Congress Party.

The election was contested by two parties, one under the leadership of one Kasimsetti Parasuramarao Naidu and the other under the joint leadership of Yerra Jagannadharao and Maddimsetti Sattayya, alias Satyanandam—the former under the name of Socialist Party, the latter under the name of Mahajana Party. The so-called Socialist Party had the backing of the Government and the mahajana Party is supposed to be in favour of merger of French Yanam with Indian Union. The election was not fought out on the specific issue of merger. The majority of voters are illiterate and labourers and they are not at all educated on the issue of merger or plebiscite, *but were solely influenced by money and drink.*

The Commissioner of Police, with a posse of constables was openly canvassing support for the Socialist Party at the point of the bayonet near about the polling booths. There was no proper police *bandobust* at any of the Police Stations. There were twelve booths and only one constable was stationed at each of the booths. No *bandobust* was requisitioned from outside inspite of the request made by the President of the Municipal Council. The entire election was vitiated by corrupt practices and bribery, and there was free distribution of money and liquor amongst the illiterate and labour voters.

Under the French rules, the polling officers, who are called the Presidents of the booths, are nominated by the local Mayor and they are entitled to stand as candidates. There is no secret ballot system, nor was there any thing like prior nomination of candidates. It is not possible to know who are the candidates for a particular ward. Each voter will be given a *patta* or identification card. On the presentation of such card, he will be given a piece of paper on which he has to write the name of the candidate whom he is supporting. It is not necessary that the voter himself should write it nor the polling officer. It is enough if he gets it written by somebody at the polling booth or even outside. He is required to place it in the only ballot box that is kept in the booth to receive the ballot papers. So the voting can be manipulated in any way the parties desire.

Just prior to the commencement of the polling on 24-10-48, the party men of Kamisetti Parasuramarao Naidu, who is backed by the French Government, attacked one Giri Madhavarao Naidu, who is a Government Pleader and one of the candidates belonging to the opposite party

under the leadership of Yerra Jagannadharao Naidu. He happens to be a Polling Officer for Ward No. 7. This man was stabbed with a knife by Kudipudi Pullayya, follower of Kamisetti Parasuramarao Naidu, while he was about to enter the polling booth after leaving the taxi in which he came. The driver of the taxi, who came to his rescue, was also stabbed. Both these people were taken to the hospital in a precarious condition. The above incident and exhibition of violence was intended to scare away the candidates and supporters of the Mahajana Party. As a matter of fact, it had the desired effect and the candidates and supporters of the Mahajana Party were scared away from the booths for fear of their lives. The party men belonging to the Socialist Party actually removed the ballot box in Ward No. 2 which is supposed to be the stronghold of the Mahajana Party. Complete lawlessness and goondaism prevailed and the Polling Officers in respect of ward Nos. 2, 6, 7, 11 and 12 were driven out of the booths where they were presiding, and their places were occupied by people belonging to the so-called Socialist Party. The result is that the whole election became a one-sided affair and a farce. The Mahajana Party was prevented from actively participating in the elections. The man who stabbed Giri Madhavarao Naidu and the driver was no doubt subsequently arrested, but he was let off for reasons best known to the French Government. I am told he is an ex-French military man and was in uniform on that day, though he was not in active service. He was not even a voter.

The French Administrator, the highest officer in Yanam armed with a revolver, patrolled the streets. But this was after the candidates and supporters of the Mahajana party

left the booths for good. By that time the mischief was already over. On account of the disturbed atmosphere and on account of the prohibition of Observers, I ventured to be on the spot *incognito* and witnessed the entire

Disturbances in Mahe

And lastly, we come to Mahe. On the 23rd October 1948, when I was in Madras, I had received an Express telegram from Mahe informing me about the disturbances there on the eve of the election and urging my immediate presence there. After my return from Pondicherry I met Shri C. E. Bharathan, the Secretary of the Mahajana Sabha, who took a leading part in the movement of protest which arose spontaneously from a people enraged at the official tactics to jerrymander the elections. He gave a full version of the happenings on that fateful day and I asked him to put it down in writing. Given below are excerpts from his report :

“The municipal elections were announced to be held on the 10th October at a time when the liberty to hold public meetings was restricted, processions were banned and popular officials were given orders of transfer. Nearly 50 workers of the pro-merger group were charged and some sentenced for holding meetings though they had observed the technicalities. Even in the court the accused had not been allowed to plead their cases. Adjournments were requested by the lawyers which were generally opposed by the Public Prosecutor and to which the judge agreed usually. The Mahe Administrator and Police Inspector with the help of the local M. L. As, tried their best to form a pro-French party and they met with partial success by making the Mayor join it. It may be

mentioned that the Mayor has full powers in conducting elections. It was then announced that the elections were postponed to the 24th October. The identification cards were issued to the voters 10 days before elections by the representatives of the Mayor. For the first 7 days, these *delegates de mairies* have to visit the houses of the voters and issue it to the persons and on the remaining 3 days from the *Mairie*. This time all the 12 *delegates de mairies* took particular care to remain in the houses of the anti-merger people and avoid the others. In some sections a bulk of 35 and 50 cards of pro-merger voters had to be recovered from the hands of the leaders of the Independent Party and again re-issued to the proper persons. Our requests to the Governor and the proper authorities for conducting the election freely, were in vain.

From the 21st October the *Cartes* were given from the *Mairie* and nearly two hundred voters were present near the office at 8 A. M. when the office was opened. Till 3-30 P.M. only 18 of them had received the cards from the Mahe Municipal office, whereas more than 40 anti-merger supporters got them the very moment they had reached the office. In the other two villages no *cartes* were given till 2-30 P. M. When the angry citizens marched in a procession to the Mayor's residence he did not give them any reassuring reply. They then returned and sat down in the courtyard determined to leave only when they got their cards. The Administrator, whom I had met earlier, also failed to set things right. After 4-30 P. M. our President, Mr. I. K. Kumaran who is also a sitting Municipal Councillor went to the Municipal Office with a view to pacify the people who were sitting in the courtyard and a large crowd of onlookers who stood on the

road nearby shouting slogans. At that time the Police Commissioner, Mr. Bassava reached there. M. Kumaran approached the latter and requested him to prevail upon these *delegates de mairies*. (The Commissioner is also the *procureur de la republique*, in which capacity he has to protect the rights of the people). The Commissioner immediately pounced on Mr. Kumaran and pulled him inside the office with a view to shut him up there. The police were then ordered to disperse the people by force. For 15 minutes there was a pandemonium when blows were exchanged between the police and the people. The sepoys used the butts of their rifles and injured some, though at last they had to give way. The people then snatched the identification cards and burnt them on the veranda of the Municipal Office. At that time the Administrator arrived on the spot with a band of armed sepoys and they were ordered to open fire. Shri P. Kumaran, Vice-President of the Mahajana Sabha, went before the Administrator and asked him to stop. Some of the people proceeded to the Police Station and demanded the surrender of the arms. To this they agreed. Then some of the volunteers of our party came with me and took charge of the arms and ammunition. The three armed guards at the Administrator's office also surrendered their guns. The records in the Administrator's Office and in the police station were also burnt. We however succeeded in preventing the people from further excesses.

The next morning a band of 30 Communists who were armed with daggers and sticks, were arrested by our volunteers when they were returning disappointed from the Administrator's residence ; they were later let out. At 9 A.M. the Congress Flag was hoisted in the Administrator's Office in the presence of 2,000 people includ-

ing the Administrator, Mayor, elected representatives and the Heads of all the Departments. A National Defence Council of 8 members was also formed. All the Departments began to function under instructions from the Defence Council. There were no untoward incident and all normal activities of the people continued. On the 26th at 9-20 A.M. a French cruiser anchored off Mahe. There was panic throughout. People began to leave their houses of their own accord. All the Heads of Departments including the Administrator also went out of Mahe. The cash in the Treasury and in the Rationing Office was also removed. It was later returned intact on the 27th. But the arms and ammunition had to be abandoned in the Indian Territory which were taken possession of by the Indian Police. Not even one cartridge was missing. On the 27th, on the advice of the Defence Council, the Administrator sent for the Captain of the ship. He and his sailors had returned on seeing the Administrator's bungalow vacant the previous day. At 3 P.M. there was a talk between representatives of the Defence Council and the Captain. The latter insisted on removing the flag and returning the weapons, while the representatives of the Defence Council demanded a clear declaration regarding the future of French India from the Colonial Minister. The talks ended at 4-30 P.M. and this was announced to the people in the public meeting along with news of the arrival of the Governor in another battleship. The decision of the Defence Council advising the people to leave the place as the workers were leaving was also communicated. Our flag was lowered at 5-30 P.M. by the Captain of the ship and the French flag was hoisted again. Armed sailors were put on sentry duty. Before the day-break of the 28th, nearly 80 per cent of the popula-

tion had left Mahe. All our workers and those of the Indian Socialist Party obeyed the advice of Dr. Rajkumar, Foreign Secretary of the A.I.C.C. not to remain in Mahe. On the 29th the Governor landed along with 300 sailors in two battleships. His request to the people to return were in vain. Yet a ceremonial parade and the hoisting the French flag was performed. On the 31st, the Governor sailed away in the battleship leaving five police officers and 32 sepoys with a large quantity of arms and ammunition. On the 3rd November 1948 the National Defence Council appealed to the people to return to their hearths and homes and the majority of them returned. The 350 workers of the Mahajana Sabha besides other nationalists and their families, remained in Indian territory to avoid arrest. They are all prepared to go back and offer *Satyagraha* and face all the repression."

So two dozen soldiers of the French Army 'recaptured' Mahe! A nation which went under the armed might of the Nazi hordes in 1940 took recourse to the same Hitlerian tactics to overawe an unarmed but gallant band of Indians. Obviously, Mahe has been 're-captured' from the people there who, after centuries of French colonial rule, breathed the pure air of freedom even though it was only for a brief period. The full picture of what happened in Mahe is yet to emerge. Nevertheless, all available accounts go to show that the people, infuriated by the unfair election tactics of the French Indian authorities, rose in revolt and made a supreme effort to shake off the fetters of slavery. They knew the consequences of such a move and were prepared to suffer. Their appeal to the Government of India to take over the administration of the freed territory, demonstrated

their anxiety and impatience to reunite with India. But the future of French Establishments being an international question between India and France, our Government could not naturally comply with this request.

Many of the refugees from Mahe, who are still living in adjoining Indian territory, were political leaders of some standing ; in fact the entire leadership of the dominant Mahe Mahajana Sabha is among them. The Government of India later suggested to the French Government that these people should be allowed to take part in the proposed Municipal Elections. But they were not allowed to do so. Consequently when elections were held in February 1949, a completely pro-French group was returned to the Municipal Assembly. It was a smooth walk-over for them in the absence of all opposition.

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As soon as the election results in Pondicherry were announced late in the night on 24th October—and the ruling party captured all the seats—I spoke to the then Congress President, Dr. Rajendra Prasad and gave him a resume of the events of the day. On his instructions, a report, giving briefly the facts relating to the elections, was cabled to Pandit Nehru, who then happened to be in Paris. Talking to Pressmen after the polling was over, my colleague Dr. Subbarayan (now Indian Ambassador to Indonesia) said that there was little secrecy about the voting, which was conducted in an open manner in the interests of the ruling clique. It was a revelation to him, he said, “as to how democratic methods might be made to secure the return of particular parties to power”. Alleging widespread malpractices in the elections, Dr. Sub-

barayan stated : *"The elections cannot really determine what the people wanted. It should not be recognised by the Government of India for the purpose of determining whether the people of these Settlements desired reunion with India.... They should find out some other method by which the problem of ascertaining the will of the people can be solved without detriment to the friendly relations between France and India. For their mutual interests this must be done as quickly as possible, as such strained relations would not be in the interests of world peace."*

The results of the elections, therefore, did not indicate the real wishes of the people. They were not fought on the issue of merger or non-merger with India. It would be a serious mistake to believe that this question ever entered the minds of the voters or the candidates. They were purely local in character and had no wider application. We attached great importance to them because they constituted the first stage in the procedure to decide the future of French India. It might be remembered that under the Indo-French Agreement the newly elected Municipal Councils were empowered to fix a date and other procedural details for a referendum over the question of merger with India. Nevertheless, the elections that came off on the 24th October 1948 did not even remotely reflect this issue. The Socialist Party did not announce during their election campaign that they stood for the *status quo*. The question was—who should control the Municipal Councils? It was frankly an attempt by the party in power to maintain itself in power by any means, fair or foul. In this, the Goubaert—Muthu Pillay group has succeeded. As they themselves admitted to me, the referendum issue was only secondary to them. At the

most, the Socialist group might utilise their victory for bargaining purposes with the Government of India in any future negotiations pertaining to the referendum.

It is unsafe to be guided by the results of the elections. It was, to say the least, nothing but the prostitution of a democratic device to ascertain popular will. Knowing French India as I do, I am definitely of the opinion that the great majority of the people there—barring a microscopic minority of vested interests—want reunion with India.

CHANDARNAGORE VOTES FOR INDIA

Both the Karma Parishad Party which had captured almost all the seats in the Chandarnagore Municipal Assembly and the Assembly itself passed resolutions favouring merger with India and demanded immediate integration with the Indian Union without the formality of a referendum. The French authorities, however, did not yield on this point despite repeated requests from the people of Chandarnagore and their duly elected representatives. Instead of gracefully giving way to this clearly expressed will of the inhabitants, the French Government forced the issue banking upon illusory hopes and encouraged by the existence of party and group differences on local matters. They had yet to learn the spirit of the Indian people. So a referendum was duly held on the 19th June 1949 and the people of Chandarnagore with a 99 % majority brought to an end the 261 year-old French rule in this historic town.

When I reached Chandarnagore on the 15th June 1949 everything appeared quiet on the outside, and apparently the situation was normal. Soon however, I sensed an under-current of uneasiness—a feeling that something catastrophic would happen on the day of the referendum, a sense of impending trouble. It was inexplicable and yet it was clear to the discerning eye that this feeling had a valid basis. Certain French agents were going about the

city freely offering bribes of various sorts to unscrupulous elements and unprincipled individuals and buying their votes in favour of France. Taking advantage of the local differences, these 'gentlemen' made serious attempts to strike a bargain with a few influential people of the locality. It is not without significance that these worthies were staying at the French Administrator's residence as his guests, and removed themselves from there only when the President of the Council of Administration protested against it. It would be a long story to recount the many methods they adopted to get a decision in favour of France. Suffice it to say that they failed ignominiously and had to bear a hasty retreat. This was a victory for the people of Chandarnagore. The countrymen of Kannailal Dutt and Rash Behari Bose had proved that they could not be bought for a few tainted rupees.

The last card in the hands of the enemies of India was played on the eve of the referendum. A whispering campaign was launched that there would be disturbances on the polling day and strong rumours were set afloat to that effect in order to scare away voters—particularly women, among whom there were about 3,000 voters—from the polling booths. On the 17th night one of the polling booths was set fire to by some miscreants acting, it was freely rumoured, under the directions of the local Police Commissioner, a Frenchman. Again on the 18th evening a procession of rowdy elements and other riff-raff was taken out along the main road with the shouting of offensive slogans. They stopped at the Municipal Assembly building and forcibly removed some furniture from there.

It was feared that this violent incident might prove infectious and make a peaceful polling impossible on the

following day. It was obvious that the available police force in the town would not suffice to prevent any major outbreak of violence, if such were to occur. The Municipal President, Shri Deben Das, therefore, requested the Administrator, M. Tailleux, to call in the West Bengal police and military for help if necessary. This could be easily done. The Administrator, however for his own reasons, refused to do any such thing without specific orders from the French Governor at Pondicherry. However, he later contacted the Governor over the telephone. The results of this discussion came as a surprise to all. Shri Deben Das was told that if necessary, the help of the West Bengal police could be called for, but that, in that event, the referendum would be vitiated. The Administrator went on to advise that the referendum might be postponed under the circumstances as trouble was expected.

The cat was now out of the bag. It was a last-minute attempt to avoid a decision on the issue—a decision which by all accounts would go against the French. The answer given was a prompt 'No'. Whatever might happen, the referendum would not be postponed, said Shri Deben Das. It was a challenge to the people and their accredited leaders and it was accepted.

Immediately, the Joint Referendum Committee under the guidance of the Congress Karma Parishad, which controls the Chandarnagore Municipal Assembly and the administration of the city, mobilized about 500 volunteers and posted a batch of them at each polling booth to guard it during the night. This proved very effective and the night passed off peacefully without a single incident. The polling booths were saved and the voting could take

place normally without any technical hitch. If a single booth had been tampered with, it would have made the referendum ineffective.

The morning of the historic 19th dawned on a situation that was absolutely peaceful and normal. This in itself was no mean victory for the nationalist forces. Most of the polling booths had begun working by about 7-30 A.M. and being Sunday, a trickling stream of voters started to flow as soon as the booths were opened. But Sunday is marketing day for the men-folk of Chandarnagore who mostly go to work in Calcutta and adjoining industrial areas, and therefore, polling was rather slack in the morning. Nevertheless by 12 noon about 30% had voted. It showed the great enthusiasm of the people. The Referendum Committee had arranged about a hundred cars and jeeps besides all available rickshaws to take the voters to the polling booths and back home. But the patriotic people of Chandarnagore did not wait for any conveyance to take them, and even old men and women preferred to walk to the polling booth in order to cast their votes for Mother India.

The polling was a quiet affair. The law forbids any propaganda on the polling day and consequently there were no demonstrations or shouting of slogans outside the 15 polling booths or anywhere else in the town. The walls in the bazar area and other localities were, however, plastered with posters appealing to the electors to vote for merger with India. One such poster attracted special attention. It was captioned "MAMA" and showed a woman in Indian dress representing Mother India stretching out her hands to a weeping child, Chandarnagore, held by another

woman dressed in the Western style to represent France. As a precautionary measure, the famous wine shops of the town and even the hotel bars were closed. The entire police force of Chandarnagore, reinforced by 40 French Indian armed policemen brought from Pondicherry and about 30 militarymen, were on duty at the polling booths and other important centres. Volunteers of the Congress Karma Parishad were present at the booths in large numbers throughout the day to assist the voters.

The voting procedure was straight and simple. Arriving at the booth, a voter went to the Presiding Officer where he presented his identity card which had been supplied to him earlier by the Municipal Assembly. After a check-up, the Presiding Officer gave the voter a blue envelope and two ballot papers, one white and the other pink, on each of which was printed in Bengali and French the question. "Do you approve of keeping Chandarnagore within the French Union?" The white paper bore the answer "Yes" and the pink "No", the latter answer indicating the wish of the voter to merge Chandarnagore in India. With these ballot papers or "*Bulletins*" as they are called in French, the voter went to a screened corner of the booth where he enclosed the paper of his choice in the envelope and returning to the Presiding Officer, put it into a locked box.

Several interesting incidents during the polling, which proved the patriotic fervour that animated the people, came to our notice. A group of ladies who came to vote refused to take the white ballot paper from the presiding officer saying it was a sin to touch them. They voted openly with the pink one in the presence of all. At some

of the booths, the electors came out after voting and proudly showed to the crowd outside the white ballot papers they had with them, thereby declaring openly that they had voted for India with the pink one. All this showed that the referendum was practically a one-sided affair. There was a universal feeling that to vote for France was something shameful and traitorous.

From the very beginning it was obvious that the voting was going overwhelmingly in favour of India. Polling went on uninterruptedly until 6 p.m. A welcome thunder-shower and heavy rain, which relieved the oppressive heat that had made life miserable, came down in all its pent-up fury at about 4 p.m. and slowed down the tempo of polling. When the skies cleared at about 5 p.m. there was again brisk polling. The Congress workers did their best to bring in as many voters as possible to the booths before the polling closed. There is no doubt that had the rains not interfered, polling would have been substantially higher than the actual figures showed.

At the close of polling at each booth, votes were counted by the presiding officer and the Assessors associated with him. The result was made known immediately and when at every booth the voting figures showed a tremendous majority for India, there was a deafening shout of "*Jai Hind*" from the crowd waiting outside and there were embraces and handshakes *en galore*. Unrestrained joy swept the whole town as the thunderstorm did earlier. Older men and women, grasping the significance of the historic vote could not control their feelings and let themselves go emotionally. Hundreds of throats were hoarse through joy and husky through unshed tears

of happiness. It was the greatest day in Chandarnagore's history and the greatest moment of that day had come. Chandarnagore had found her lost soul. I for one, though not a local resident, felt thrilled to be present on that historic occasion to witness the end of French rule.

In the Municipal Assembly offices where I was sitting at about 10 p.m. there was feverish activity. Final figures from each of the fifteen polling booths started coming in one by one and we sat down with childish excitement to add them up. Within half an hour we had the total figures—7,473 for India and 114 for France. We embraced each other like men out of their senses. We were drunk with joy. In a matter of minutes I put in a trunk call to New Delhi to the Prime Minister. I got the connection at about 11 p.m. and I conveyed the glad news of India's tremendous victory to Jawaharlal Nehru who was very happy to hear it. He sent an inspiring message to the people of Chandarnagore which said :

"The news of the decision of the overwhelming majority of the people of Chandarnagore, freely expressed by the democratic method of a referendum, to join the Indian Union has naturally caused me and my colleagues great satisfaction, satisfaction which, I feel sure, is shared by the entire Indian people. We welcome Chandarnagore and its people to the Indian Union and to the Indian Republic to be as partners in the disciplined liberty of a great country and in the great tasks that confront us.

It is particularly gratifying to me that the referendum should have passed off peacefully. The Government and people of France, for whom the Government and people of India entertain feelings of sincere friendship, should see

in the result of the referendum in Chandernagore proof of the sentiment of the peoples of their Settlements in India for reunion with their motherland and of India's desire that this process of change, inevitable by reasons of history, geography, culture and the spirit of the times, should be voluntary and peaceful and should strengthen the existing bonds of friendship between India and France.

I send my greetings to the people of Chandarnagore and my good wishes for their future progress and prosperity. The form in which Chandarnagore will join the Indian Union will be decided after full consideration of all the issues involved including, more especially, the wishes of the people."

Meanwhile a report on the proceedings, together with the result of voting at each booth, had been sent for scrutiny to a Special Commission of three persons presided over by a local Magistrate. Complaints, if any, were also to be lodged with this body within 12 hours of the close of the polling. Two such complaints were filed, but both were ruled out as invalid. The Commission's final verdict on the results of the referendum was made available on the night of the 21st June. It did not differ in any manner from the earlier results.

The curtain was thus rung down on the Chandarnagore referendum and after two and a half centuries of foreign rule, the city had returned to the bosom of the Mother. The peaceful character of the referendum was partly due to the non-controversial nature of the question posed to the voters and partly to the strict neutrality adopted by the police and other officers of the French administration. This must be said to the credit of the

French that, at least in Chandarnagore, they did not interfere with the conduct of the polling. If they maintain the same attitude when the referendum comes off in the four South Indian Settlements and do not encourage by underhand methods disruptive and anti-social elements there, I have no doubt whatsoever about the results. Like Chandarnagore they will also vote overwhelmingly for India. Meanwhile the first nail has been driven into the coffin of the French empire in India.

Before we close this momentous chapter in the history of French rule in India, I might as well refer to the activities of the two so-called neutral Observers appointed by the Vice President of the International Court of Justice by request of the French Government. These two European worthies (Holger Andersen of Denmark and Rudolfo Castro of El Salvador) came to Chandarnagore a few days before the referendum after having been briefed by the French Administration at Pondicherry as to their duties. They were staying throughout with the French Administrator of Chandarnagore as his guests. They dined and wineed with him. On the polling day they went round the city in posh cars, entered the polling booths and put a question or two to the persons in charge, and at the end of the day, completely tired out after their strenuous labours, retired and wrote out a pompous little report for the benefit of the French Overseas Ministry and the edification of that august international judicial body which sent them. This is in short the story of the international supervision of the referendum which France makes so much of !

After an unconscionably long delay on the part of the French Government, the *de facto* transfer of Chandar-

nagore to India took place on 2nd May 1950 and an Indian Administrator was appointed by the Government of India to take charge of the town. Pending *de jure* transfer, it was intended that the French laws should continue to prevail, but the French authorities, evidently cut up at the turn of events there, were in a sulky mood and refused to cooperate with the Government of India in this matter. Consequently, some of the essential Indian laws have had to be extended to Chandarnagore under the Foreign Jurisdiction Act.

On 2nd February 1951, the Indian Ambassador in Paris and a representative of the French Government signed a Treaty for the cession of Chandarnagore. This constitutes the penultimate stage of the transfer this territory to the Indian Union; the Treaty has now to be ratified by the French Parliament, after which Chandarnagore will become *de jure* a part of the Indian Union. The treaty consists of a Preamble and 12 Articles. A Protocol regarding financial issues and the question of the employees of the Chandarnagore administration, together with an exchange of letters, is annexed to the Treaty. A brief summary of the main provisions is given below :

1. *Sovereignty*

France transfers to India in full sovereignty the territory of the Free Town of Chandarnagore.

2. *Citizenship*

French subjects and citizens of the French Union domiciled in Chandarnagore will, on the coming into force of the treaty, automatically become Indian citizens. However, persons desiring to retain French nationality will

be given six months in which to make a declaration to this effect. Such persons, moreover, will be permitted by the Government of India to transfer their assets and property to any French territory where they may wish to permanently reside on application to the competent Indian authorities.

3. Assets & Liabilities

The French Government will transfer all state and public-owned property lying in the territory of Chandarnagore to the Government of India. The latter will succeed to all the rights and obligations resulting from acts undertaken by the French Government for public purposes concerning the Chandarnagore administration. Financial and monetary issues arising out of the transfer are to be examined by a mixed Franco-Indian Commission, which has already been set up. Its recommendations are subject to the approval of the two Governments.

4. Judicial Matters

Appropriate Indian authorities will execute judgments and decrees passed before 2nd May 1950, the date of *de facto* transfer, by French judicial authorities having jurisdiction over Chandarnagore. Appeals arising out of judgment or decrees passed by French authorities having jurisdiction over Chandarnagore before 2nd May 1950, shall, subject to the law of limitation in force immediately before that date, be disposed of as though the territory had not been transferred to India. Moreover, appeals pending on 2nd May 1950, shall be dealt with by the authorities before whom they were pending. The decisions regarding these appeals will be executed by the appropriate Indian authorities.

5. *Cultural Matters*

The French Government will be allowed to remove, in consultation with the Government of India, such archives as have a general historical interest. Those archives, however, which are of interest to the local administration of Chandarnagore will be placed at the disposal of the Government of India. The latter will assist in the continuance of the French cultural heritage of Chandarnagore, in accordance with the wishes of the people, and will allow the establishment or continuance of cultural services by the French Government.

6. *Chandarnagore employees*

The Government of India will take over civil servants and employees of the Free Town of Chandarnagore and those of the French Establishments in India who might have been serving in the Chandarnagore on 2nd May 1950. However, such employees or civil servants can exercise, within three months of the coming into force of the treaty, the option to serve their original, i. e. French administration; and such civil servants and employees whom the Government of India do not desire to retain will be given three months notice of termination of their services within one month from the date of the coming into force of the treaty, and shall be entitled to be paid fair compensation.

Meanwhile, in view of the *de jure* transfer and taking into account the changes that have already taken place in Chandarnagore following the *de facto* transfer, the Government of India have felt it necessary to dissolve the present Municipal Assembly elected three years ago and to hold fresh elections to it, in order to give as representative a

character as possible to the administration of the city. Pending the election of a fresh Municipal Council and of a Council of Administration by it, an Administrative Commission has been constituted by the Administrator, as envisaged in Article 15 of the Decree of 7th November 1947 creating the Free City of Chandrnagore. The Municipal elections will be held in accordance with existing rules and the existing franchise and at as early a date as possible.

At present the pattern of administration in Chandarnagore is in accordance with the provisions of the above-mentioned Decree of the French Government. The Government of India are now considering changes in the administrative set-up in order to make it conform more closely to Indian practice and, at the same time, extend as full a measure of autonomy to Chandarnagore as possible. One major change already decided upon is to apply the principle of adult franchise to Chandarnagore so as to make any municipal or legislative body set up hereafter, fully representative of the people. Preliminary steps necessary to give effect to this decision are being taken immediately, but it will inevitably be some time before elections based on adult franchise can be held. This decision will not apply to the municipal elections to be held now. Pending finalisation of the Government of India's plans with regard to the future set-up of Chandarnagore, the administration there will continue as after *de facto* transfer, with such changes as may from time to time become necessary. The guiding principle of any changes, it may be emphasised, will be to ensure efficiency without in any way detracting from the autonomy at present enjoyed, thereby keeping the promise given to the people of the foreign Settlements that their autonomy will be respected to the extent they wish to keep it.

THE NEW MUNICIPAL COUNCILS MEET

The June 1948 Agreement had empowered the elected Municipal Councils of the four Settlements in South India to fix the date and modalities of the referendum and had thereby placed the initiative in the hands of the persons who, as we have seen, owe their position to French patronage and who are completely under the control of the ruling clique—M. Goubaert, the Minister in charge of General Administration and Labour, M. Muthu Pillay, the Mayor of Pondicherry and the other Ministers. They are mere clay in the hands of these unscrupulous politicians with vested interests and could be expected to behave as ordered by their masters. In reality, therefore, the whole conduct of the proposed referendum lay in the hands of these few individuals. Needless to say, they took full advantage of this position and began to flirt with both India and France hoping to enjoy the best of both the worlds.

The Municipalities of Pondicherry, Karikal, Yanam and Mahe had met in March 1949 and fixed 11th December 1949 as the date for the referendum there, suggesting at the same time certain modalities for conducting it. In view of this, the Government of India made vigorous representations to the French Government urging upon them the need for conducting the proposed referendum

in an impartial manner free from any sort of pressure and unfair practices such as characterised the municipal elections. In particular, they stressed the necessity of having neutral Observers to supervise all stages of the referendum and the free participation therein of all persons or groups who were now residing outside as political refugees.

The meeting of the Municipal Councils also decided to send a Delegation to Paris and Delhi with a view to find out from the French and Indian Governments what exactly their respective attitudes were towards the future of these Establishments. This Delegation, consisting of top leaders of the so-called Socialist Party of French India, first went to Paris, presumably to find out what the French would give them if they supported France at the time of the referendum and helped her to win it. In France, they were promised full autonomy *after the referendum was over* i.e., if the latter went in favour of the French connection.

The Delegation then came to Delhi in the latter half of 1949 to contact the Government of India in order to find out what their intentions were with regard to the future status of the French territories if and when they decided to merge with India. In spite of the fact that they had no legal or constitutional standing, the Government of India received them as distinguished visitors and they were shown full honours and hospitality. The Foreign Ministry, the Prime Minister and the Governor-General gave them dinner, lunch and tea. They flew over to Agra and admired the beauty of the Taj Mahal. Throughout their talks here, they gave the impression that they were inclined to vote for reunion with India

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and, in an expansive mood, went to the extent of assuring our Government of their support. They gave out that they did not want a referendum to settle the future of French India. On the other hand they favoured a direct settlement of the question by mutual negotiations in which of course, they would have a voice. A meeting of all the Municipal Councillors was to be held soon at Pondicherry before which they would place their recommendations on the subject.

They did not, of course, fool anybody here. So far as they were concerned, it was purely a business deal. They would jump on whichever side provided softer ground. It was 'realpolitik' with a vengeance. Our Government, which is committed to the Jaipur Congress Resolution on Foreign Possessions, made clear their stand and told them in no uncertain terms that integration with India would not disturb in any manner the mode of administration or the way of life in the French Possessions without previous consultation with and consent of the people concerned.

The meeting of the Municipal Councillors of the four Settlements was held on the 17th and 18th October 1949 at Pondicherry under the chairmanship of the Mayor of Pondicherry—Shri K. Muthu Pillay. From the very beginning it became clear that it was a trumped-up show. M. Goubaert completely dominated the Assembly and got a set of resolutions approved by the ignorant and nervous members in the correct Hitlerian style. A number of basic conditions were laid down for the conduct of the referendum which was postponed indefinitely. The difficulties of the people residing in those Communes

of the Pondicherry area which are surrounded on all sides by Indian territory, were stressed and it was recommended that if nothing could be done by France to ease their lot by negotiations with India, *these island portions of Pondicherry may be ceded to India even without a referendum.* (Even a Goubaert could not alter geography!). The meeting "noted the decision of the Council of Ministers at Paris, in their sitting of the 27th July 1949, to confer on the French Indian Establishments, an autonomous status" and demanded that the necessary measures in this connection should be immediately passed by the (French) Parliament *without waiting for the results of the referendum.* So, while France proposed to grant this autonomy *after* the referendum, Messrs. Goubaert and company asked for it immediately.

The meeting likewise took note "of the intentions expressed by the Delhi Government to the Delegation as regards the status to be accorded to our Establishments". There was no other reference to India's attitude and nothing was said either accepting the Indian offer or rejecting it. Evidently a non-committal stand suited them best under the circumstances. But in the course of his speech before the Assembly, M. Goubaert made certain statements about the Indian Government's intentions with regard to the future of the French Indian Settlements which had no valid basis in fact and which were at variance with what he was actually told when he was in Delhi as a member of the Delegation from French India. Presumably it was a case of deliberate distortion on his part with the object of misleading his audience. The Government of India promptly denied these allegations in a communique clarifying their attitude on this subject. We shall have to advert to this later.

Finally, the meeting waived "its claim to be consulted on the subject of fixing the date of the referendum" and agreed "in advance to whatever decisions the two Governments may take in the matter." In other words they threw the 'referendum baby' back into the laps of India and France leaving them to quarrel over it as long as they liked.

The referendum and the conditions under which it should be held, have ever since been a bone of contention between the two Governments. Weeks have elapsed into months and a full year has passed ; still a solution is nowhere in sight. So far the Socialist Party leaders had played their cards well ! The *status quo* suits them to a T and they do not complain !

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THE SITUATION TODAY

The two and a half years that have elapsed since the conclusion of the Indo-French Agreement in 1948, have been a godsend to the French Government as well as to their puppets in the four Settlements. The latter have fully utilised this period to entrench themselves in power and to fleece the poverty-stricken masses. The former have blatantly encouraged them in this nefarious game and have put them up in opposition to the cause of nationalism. They have been put forward as the real representatives of the people and it is said that these 'real representatives' desire the continuation of French rule in these Establishments. A regime of corruption and oppression rules over an unfortunate people who do not still feel the glow of freedom even after three and half years of liberation of the rest of India.

There is a general impression among the Indian public that when the French offered the 1948 agreement to India they sincerely wanted to transfer their sovereignty over these Possessions here in a peaceful manner as the British did. Later, however, seeing the multitudinous problems we had to tackle and the difficulties we had to face, the French attitude stiffened until reactionary elements in Paris as well as in Pondicherry, which had been swept away by the forces of nationalism soon after August 1947,

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came into their own and gained the upper hand. These forces began to influence the policy of the French metropolitan government—in particular, the French Overseas Ministry—towards their colonies. It is possible that this is the correct reading of the situation as it has developed.

Be that as it may, today it is a patent fact that the French do not want to give up their Indian Possessions without a struggle and a hard struggle at that. They are now adopting every possible method to retain these territories. Nothing is too low for them, nothing too crude, if thereby they can continue their rule. Terrorism and intimidation is their first weapon. Nationalist workers are ruthlessly dealt with. In proof of this assertion, one instance would suffice. M. Ambroise, a respected member of the Pondicherry Bar and ordinarily a calm, dignified and law-abiding citizen, became an outcast and a 'criminal' the day he became the Working President of the Pondicherry Merger Committee, an organisation of all parties and groups working for reunion with India. His house was stoned and rowdies were set upon him to threaten his life. Other workers for the Indian cause were no less badly treated. A procession taken out by the public of Pondicherry in celebration of Chandarnagore Day and the public meeting held afterwards were disturbed by rowdy elements who threw stones and other missiles at the gathering. The Indian national flag which was being carried by the processionists was forcibly removed and destroyed while the police merely looked on. Under the guise of suppressing Communists, several houses belonging to pro-Indian residents of Pondicherry were set fire to and destroyed under the very nose of the police and the gendarmerie who looked on at the gruesome scene nonchalantly. The law did

not lift a finger to stop this deliberate arson. It was obvious that the administration had engineered this to crush Indian sympathisers. Recently, a bomb was thrown at M. Saravane, Deputy from French India to the French Parliament, when he was returning from a visit to the Indian Consulate. The reason was that M. Saravane has been vigorously demanding the transfer of the French Establishments to India without the formality of a referendum. Shortly after, an attempt was also made to set fire to his house. The other day, M. Dadela, an Inspector of the French C. I. D. was dismissed from service because he refused to disclose certain information about pro-Indian activities in Pondicherry, which it was alleged, was in his possession. M. Dadela had clearly shown pro-merger sympathies and this was something which could not be tolerated. This worthy police officer has now joined the ranks of the patriots fighting for their freedom against alien rule. Three hundred workers of the Pondicherry Mills have been sent away because their loyalty to the French Government has come under suspicion.

The story of intimidation is a longer one in the other Settlements. In Karikal, a Minister of the French Indian Government has been terrorising his locality, Thirumalrayapatnam, in Nazi fashion. He is notorious throughout French India as a smuggler and has made his pile through these means. Like a *gauleiter*, he suppresses every one who comes in his way. His wrath has particularly fallen on the poor fishermen of the locality who are terrorised beyond endurance. Suragudi, a small border village was practically wiped out by the French Indian police and *goondas*, because its inhabitants dared to show pro-Indian feelings by hoisting the Indian National Flag. Refugees

from that village are still in Indian territory afraid to go back for fear of losing their lives. In Tirunallar, the only Commune in Karikal where the Congress (which is pro-merger) is in a majority, the Mayor, M. Subraya Naicker, was suspended for a month merely because he arranged a reception in my honour when I visited Karikal in November 1949. Workers of the Karikal Merger Congress like Shrikanta Ramanujam, M. Nagarajan and S. O. Rangaswami Pillay are constantly harassed and intimidated. Even a local journalist, M. S. Vijayaraghavan who is an Indian citizen, has been threatened several times with murder because he sends out reports of official atrocities and intimidation to the Indian papers. A local dentist was harassed so much by the police when he became a member of the Karikal Merger Congress that he was compelled to resign from that body.

In Mahe on the Malabar coast, forty people were sentenced *in absentia* in May 1950 to 20 years' imprisonment and a fine of 1000 francs and ten others to 5 years' imprisonment for participation in the October 1948 revolution. The French citizenship of all the accused was suspended and their properties confiscated by the Government. The manner in which these trials were conducted gives a fair idea of the atmosphere prevailing in the French territories ; they were concluded in exactly three days, no defence witnesses dared to appear for the accused and not even prosecution evidence was recorded. They are still in Indian territory living in a miserable condition as refugees from a corrupt and irresponsible administration. Other nationalists who were in Mahe were caught and are rotting in jail. The dependents of these patriots, helpless women and children, are undergoing great suffering.

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In Yanam, things are equally bad. Due to the smallness of the area, a couple of individuals backed by the local French Administrator can easily hold the whole population in their grip. The poor, illiterate and ignorant villagers are fear-stricken. The few educated people who attempt to raise a voice of protest are promptly suppressed. Yanam therefore has no politics. The French rule there like an autocratic *Zamindar*.

This well-directed campaign of terrorism and intimidation is supplemented by an equally well-thought out scheme of making tempting offers to people in key positions so that they may not waver in their loyalty to *la France*. The two top-most men in French India politics were recently decorated with the insignia of the *Legion d'au Honneur* for their "meritorious services to the French empire", that is to say, for being traitors to the Indian cause. These two gentlemen ofcourse truly deserve the honour for they, more than anybody else, are today helping the French to keep the tottering structure of their colonial rule on Indian soil from crumbling. One of these gentlemen cannot export to India the groundnut oil produced in his mills in Pondicherry. So an obliging Governor offers to buy the whole lot and ship it elsewhere. Another, a son-in-law of a member of the French India Representative Assembly who was actively working for the merger cause, was spirited away to Paris with a study scholarship. The French Government goes out of their way to oblige influential people and thus keep them in their camp.

Hundreds of workers of the four mills in Pondicherry are regularly bribed to work as paid agents and to be at the beck and call of the administration whenever their

services are needed. These services take the form of acting as rowdies to intimidate chosen people, at the behest of the Government, by threatening to kill them or by beating them or throwing stones at their houses and in extreme cases, even setting fire to them. While doing this job they often get dead drunk at the expense of the authorities. In effect, they form a sort of volunteer force at the disposal of the Government, and the present group in power banks greatly upon this wretched collection of individuals to keep itself in power. It is humanly impossible for these poor ignorant people to resist the great temptation offered them to act as agents of the corrupt local Government.

No review of the present situation in French India would be complete without a mention of the smuggling activities that are so widely prevalent along the Indian border. As a matter of fact, French India today thrives on its smuggling trade and the authorities there, even if they do not indirectly encourage it, seem to shut their eyes on what is going on. Smuggling began soon after the termination of the Customs Union Agreement between the Government of India and the French Indian authorities. The Customs Union was entered into between the two parties in 1941 during the war. Under this Agreement, in return for the payment of an annual subsidy of Rs. 6·2 lakhs by the Government of India to the French Indian authorities, the latter handed over customs jurisdiction over the area to the Indian Government ; and consequently for purposes of import-export and customs Regulations, French India became virtually a part of India. The Agreement was liable to termination on a year's notice. In March 1948, (i.e. before the declaration of June 1948)

the Government of India gave a year's notice to terminate the Customs Union as conditions had changed since the Agreement was made. No reply was received from the French Government for about a year, and in February 1949, the Government of India offered to continue the Agreement until the referendum was over in order not to disturb the existing arrangements. France did not accept this offer, but in the middle of March 1949, they proposed instead a modification of the 1941 Agreement which, because of the very short time left before it expired on the 31st March, the Government of India could not consider. The 1941 Agreement, therefore, lapsed with effect from 1st April 1949. French India thereupon became foreign territory and a customs cordon was thrown round Pondicherry and Karikal. The Government of India also introduced a permit system regulating the movement of persons between the French Establishments and surrounding Indian territory, which has since been withdrawn as it proved troublesome especially to the poor people living on the border.

By the establishment of the customs cordon, no necessities of life have been or are being denied to the people of French India. The Government of India have ensured that their essential and genuine requirements are met. In Mahe, for example, Indian authorities have seen to it that the people get the quota commodities regularly inspite of the difficulties they have had to feed their own people. The French Indian Government have little complaint on this score.

It is surprising therefore that the Customs Cordon should have given rise to smuggling on a very large scale,

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thus depriving India of her legitimate customs duty and bringing unexpected wealth into the pockets of a favoured few basking in the sunshine of French patronage. Obviously this could not be done without the connivance of the French authorities. Imports of large quantities of goods cannot be effected without their permission and without making available to trade the necessary exchange. The requirements of French Possessions of foreign goods could be easily assessed from the fact that formerly, when only one ship at the most could come to Pondicherry in a year or so, now, about eight ships filled with merchandise of all sorts come to Pondicherry from European and Asian countries, besides several country crafts which are continuously coming from Ceylon and other places near India. All this merchandise is not required for the consumption of French India. Why then do the authorities not check it? They are in the know of the surreptitious manner in which the goods are smuggled out of Pondicherry, but they possibly encourage it because it helps their trade and income, and it also creates a large trading class which acquires a stake in the continuance of the French Possessions in India. Almost all shops in Pondicherry today cater to smugglers. Big business and anti-social elements of Pondicherry are making huge profits on smuggled goods without undergoing any risk.

The main commodities that are smuggled are diamonds, gold, cycles, silk, perfumes, fountain pens and watches. The French authorities realise a nominal duty of 2 to 5 per cent on the articles with the result that the difference in prices between French India and the Indian Union is, on some articles, to the tune of 50 to 60 per cent. On diamonds, it is said, the smuggler easily gets double the

money that he pays at Pondicherry. It is also reported that diamonds worth rupees two crores were imported into Pondicherry during the last one year and a half. The difference in the prices of Raleigh cycles will reveal the profits these smugglers make. Its price in Pondicherry is Rs. 140. In India one has to pay about double the amount. Recently several thousand cycles were imported but, barring a few dozen which were sold locally, all have disappeared—evidently smuggled out.

There are customs posts set up by the Indian Union authorities at some places but the area to be guarded is so big that actually they are not able to do much. The French area near Pondicherry is not a compact whole. The Indian and French territories are so intermingled that at some places one can actually hop from French to French territories passing the Indian Union area in between. At some places even the road is divided half and half between the Indian and French Governments. The presence of a large number of enclaves makes the task of our customs staff extremely difficult. Again, there is a large strip of sea-coast connected with Pondicherry where a check is difficult without an actual blockade. Sometimes big gangs of smugglers are armed with modern weapons and the guards have to encounter gangs superior in numbers and arms. Clashes of this sort are not rare on the borders. Even then our customs staff have done very good work and have been seizing during the last two years contraband goods worth eight or nine lakhs of rupees annually. Of course, it is only a very small proportion of the total goods smuggled out, because the big gangsters do it in a very 'scientific' way and it is difficult to apprehend them.

Thus the French authorities have resorted to means which do little credit to the democratic traditions of their

great country. Anti-merger parties are encouraged by the lure of jobs and the facilities for 'contraband trade'. Members belonging to parties aiming at French India's merger with the Indian Union are harassed in all manner of ways. Ruffians hired by the party in power are let loose to pounce upon those who show the least pro-Indian feelings. Government servants with pro-merger inclinations are summarily dismissed and anti-merger individuals and their relations are being appointed in key posts and lucrative jobs. Cases of arson and loot are frequent and the people are living under a veritable reign of terror. People feel that the French Government have even brought pressure on the Aurobindo Ashram in Pondicherry, which is a place of free spiritual thought and which is mostly financed by Indian money, so as to force it to keep up a show of pro-French attitude. Nationalist circles in Pondicherry are critical of the fact that this great institution, which should have been a source of strength to them, is not being allowed to have even pro-Indian sympathies. In spite of all this however, it should be said to their credit that these methods have not succeeded in terrorising the people of French India absolutely, although, for fear of repercussions, they dare not express their feelings freely.

The present situation in French India therefore leaves no doubt that the attitude of the French is not at all friendly towards India. They have even acted just contrary to Indian policies in order to create difficulties for us. Take prohibition for instance. With the enforcement of prohibition in the surrounding areas of Madras, one would have expected a helpful gesture on the part of the French Indian authorities. Instead, they have actually encouraged

free tapping of toddy and brewing of liquor with the result that the drink habit has increased everywhere in the French Settlements. Every street-corner in Pondicherry has its Liquor Bar which naturally attracts drunkards from the Indian side. In Mahe, the French Administrator officially opens a Liquor Bar for the benefit of 'his people'. Result—liquor flows like water in French India today ! One cannot help thinking that "what India discourages, French India encourages". In short the whole policy of the French Government is to give all-out support to anti-merger elements and to create in the minds of the people the impression that if they line up with India, they would be the losers.

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CONCLUSION

The recent events in Pondicherry and elsewhere, to some of which I have been an eye-witness, prove how decadent French colonial administration is and to what extent it is prepared to go, following its divide-and-rule policy, to stick to its little bits of Indian territory against popular opposition. We, who have been condemning colonial rule in distant Indonesia and Viet-Nam and have supported the freedom struggle of those peoples, cannot shut our eyes to what is happening at our door-step. Really speaking, it is not a big problem for India to solve. It has become complicated because a foreign power is involved. For us who have successfully tackled much bigger problems, French India is a mere pimple. But even pimples sometimes get septic and call for surgical treatment.

For the present, however, the referendum idea still holds the field. But few can have any doubt about its utter futility after the experience we have had in the municipal elections. If a referendum is held on the same lines and under purely French supervision, it will go the same way the elections have gone, because the same methods are bound to be followed. There will be all kinds of malpractices. Assessors of the pro-merger group will be prevented from entering the polling booth ;

they will be intimidated and even assaulted. The pro-French group would then capture the booths and do as they like. Ballot papers will be tampered with. Open voting would be practised in favour of the French. Sheer might would prevail. No decent person would come to tender his vote under such circumstances. If he does, he would be made to vote for the French. Even the presence of so-called international Observers would not prevent the French authorities from manipulating the voting, because the French colonial officials are past-masters in the game of sabotaging the ballot-box. This, by the way, is not peculiar to French India. A friend of mine from Madagascar, to whom I described these October 1948 elections, said there was nothing surprising about it. The same practice obtained in French Madagascar too, she said !

Therefore, if there is to be a referendum, India must insist on its being held under impartial supervision at every stage from the preparation of electoral rolls and the proper distribution of voter's cards right up to the counting of votes. Civil liberties should be restored. Pro-Indian parties should be allowed to carry on political propaganda. Political prisoners should be released. Activities of goondas and anti-social elements should be sternly curbed. Electoral rolls should be prepared on an impartial basis and the names of those who have been struck off for pro-merger feelings should be restored. Perfect secrecy of polling must be provided for ; and our military and police should be posted at every polling booth in all the Settlements to prevent intimidation of voters and other unfair tactics.

These are the demands of the people of French India. It is a moot point, in the light of what I have observed,

whether even these precautions would get the right decision of the people. The French Indian authorities have the genius and aptitude to explore new ways to upset all our calculations. But we need have no doubt about the results of a really free and fair referendum. The overwhelming majority of the people would vote for India. They even feel that a referendum or plebiscite is an insult to their self-respect and patriotism ; and they have all along been insisting on unconditional and immediate reunion with India.

It is futile to believe that the French Government would agree to a referendum held under such conditions, for that would mean utter defeat for them. What they are aiming at probably is a snap vote in their favour under the protecting wings of the 1948 Agreement which is delightfully vague about the method and manner of popular consultation. If that be so, we ought to be more vigilant. As long as the 1948 Agreement lasts, India's position is clearly weak.

Scrapping the Agreement itself would therefore seem to be unavoidable under present circumstances. If we do that, the question of fresh negotiations would immediately arise and both the Governments can deal with the problem on a rational level. The best solution would of course lie in an outright transfer of these areas to the Indian Union under mutually agreed conditions. Once this principle is conceded, the details of the transfer can be agreed to without much difficulty. If the idea can be worked out, it would eliminate a referendum and all the elaborate arrangements connected with it. What is more, it would avoid a lot of bitterness and unpleasant incidents

which might otherwise vitiate Indo-French relations for years to come.

Meanwhile I have seen many things in the French Establishments which have disheartened me. But I have also witnessed scenes of love and affection for Mother India and unbounded enthusiasm for our cause. I have no doubt whatsoever that people in French India do not desire continuance of French rule. But the mass of the people are illiterate and to them it is a vague issue. Some of them do not even know that they are under the French. It is therefore easy for the French administration to mislead them. For instance, they are told that once they join India, prohibition would be brought into force and they would be denied their daily dose of the "beverage that inebriates." This has a profound effect on them—and the poor mostly take to liquor to drown their sorrows and sufferings as elsewhere in the world—and they are all for France and toddy! Still others, pensioners of the French Government and members of the *Arse Combatant*, are told that they would lose their pensions and other privileges if they join the Indian Union. This has likewise an adverse effect. This and various other dubious methods are adopted to mislead the politically ignorant population.

We have no means to check this insidious propaganda and our friends in French India are consequently at a disadvantage. They naturally expect material help from us in their struggle for freedom. They accuse us of inertia and lack of initiative after we won freedom for ourselves from the British. They complain that India has agreed to a referendum over their heads and without consulting

them. They maintain, and rightly too, that though their opponents are getting all kinds of facilities and help from the French Government, they are not receiving any sort of aid or encouragement from the Indian Government. Even where the Government of India could have legitimately pulled up the French authorities, as for example in cases of violation of the Indian border by the French police or increasing of their Police Force beyond actual needs, the Indian Government have not cared to protest, they say.

While all this may be true, the justification for such behaviour on India's part lies in her anxiety to settle this problem in a peaceful and honourable manner. India could immitate France if she liked. She could have made it impossible for the French Government and their stooges to carry on even for a day as they have done all these three years. Nevertheless it is not necessary for India to follow in the footsteps of France and enter into a competition with the French Indian authorities in a desperate attempt to win over the population to our side.

Their future as part and parcel of the Indian Union is absolutely safe. The Jaipur Congress resolution says :-
"The Congress realises that during this long period, administrative, cultural, educational and judicial systems have grown up in these Foreign Possessions, which are different from those prevailing in the rest of India. Any change-over therefore, must take these factors into consideration and allow for a gradual adjustment which will not interfere with the life of the people of the areas concerned. The Congress would welcome the present cultural heritage of these Possessions to be continued, in so far as the people of those Possessions desire, and for a measure of autonomy to be granted, wherever possible, so as to enable the people of

those Possessions to maintain their culture and institutions within the larger frame-work of free India."

The Nasik Congress has reiterated this resolution as recently as last September. The Government of India also on their part, have made clear their policy regarding the post-merger status of the French Settlements. In an official communique issued by the External Affairs Ministry on 27th October 1949, they have declared that *"in the event of the French Possessions in India deciding to join the Indian Union, they will be administered as an autonomous unit in direct relation with the Central Government."* The communique went on to say : *"Any subsequent changes in the internal administrative set-up of these Settlements will be carried out only after consulting local public opinion. The special linguistic and cultural interests of the people of these Settlements will be preserved. The Government of India would provide adequate funds for carrying on their administration and for the payment of pensions and similar commitments of the existing administration. Provision has now been made in the new Constitution permitting the representation of these Settlements in the Union legislature."*

These assurances now find a place in the new Indian Constitution. Article I, Clause (3), Sub-Clause (c), refers to "such other territories as may be acquired" as forming part of the Indian Union, indicating the separate identity of territories joining the Republic in the future. Article 67-A provides for representation in Parliament to territories not included within any State (Province) at present on a special basis to be decided by Parliament by a simple law to that effect. It should be noted that on a strictly population basis, the French Indian territories

would not be entitled to send even a single representative to the future Indian parliament. I am revealing no secret when I say that it was at the express desire of the French Indian Delegation which came to Delhi, that this provision was made as a special case during the closing stages of the Second Reading of the Draft Constitution. Shri T. T. Krishnamachari, who piloted this clause, specifically mentioned the object of this new Article. Again, Article 215, Clause (i), of the Constitution provides, that any territory comprised within the territory of India but not specified in the relevant Schedule at present, shall be administered by the President acting through a Chief Commissioner or similar authority.

All these provisions taken in conjunction give a clear picture of the status that the French or the Portuguese Possessions in India will occupy once they decide to join the Indian Union. On the face of these definite commitments, it is difficult to understand how the French Indian administration can have the audacity to misrepresent things to their people as they have sought to do recently. But then, it is not the people of French India or their real representatives who are worried about their future in India. They know fully well the glorious destiny that awaits them as citizens of the great Republic of India. Only a few self-centred politicians with vested interests have imaginary doubts about their ability to continue to cling to power under altered circumstances. The poverty-stricken masses of these colonial areas have nothing to lose but their chains.

In one sense, however, there is no future for 'French India' ! There is only one India today—a free democratic

India ; and there is no place in it for any foreign Possessions, whether French or Portuguese. The continued existence of the French and Portuguese Settlements on Indian soil is therefore an anomaly. These little enclaves in foreign hands are a great danger to India's security. For ought we know, they might be used by our enemies, whoever they may be, as bases for future operations against us. Already the French are flirting with Pakistan, and trade between Pondicherry and Karachi has been officially encouraged. These areas may therefore prove dangerous to Indian interests in the future. India must get them back. If the foreign Powers concerned think that we are not serious about this question, they are grievously mistaken. Let not India's anxiety for a peaceful solution be mistaken for weakness by France and Portugal ! The problem is ripe for solution. Public opinion in India is getting restive and impatient at the inordinate delay in destroying these centres of colonial rule on our soil which are today cesspools of corruption and which are reeking with anti-Indian propaganda. People in these areas—our own kith and kin—are no less impatient. The spontaneous uprisings in Mahe shows which way the wind blows.

France gave to the world the glorious motto - Liberty, Equality, Fraternity—conceptions on which the whole structure of democracy rests today. Are the French people—lovers of democracy themselves—ignorant of what is happening in a corner of their own overseas empire ? It is often asserted, even by responsible Frenchmen that the French people and the French Parliament are deliberately kept ignorant of this problem and the immensity of Indian feeling over this matter by the French colonial

office which has, it appears, developed a vested interest in these Possessions. Whether this be true or not, it is high time that progressive elements in France make their Government see light and make themselves free of an outdated imperialism.

When India became independent on 15th August 1947, a wave of enthusiasm spread over the French and Portuguese Possessions in this country and the people of these areas—who, although under different Governments, are akin to us in religion, customs and manners and are bone of our bone and flesh of our flesh—felt jubilant that the day was near when they too would join the rest of India after centuries of separation to share her long-lost freedom. Three years have elapsed since independence and yet, excepting Chandarnagore, foreign imperialism does not show any readiness to hand over to India what is India's. Would it be too much to expect the French and the Portuguese to quit gracefully even as the British have done in the rest of India and thus avert a clash with a friendly country? It is for the Government of India to devise means to get these foreign footholds amalgamated with the rest of the country as early as possible. They will have the support of the whole country in whatever action they may take to achieve this end.

President Soekarno of Indonesia, speaking recently about his country's claim to Dutch New Guinea said : *"I declare here with the profoundest conviction that the day will certainly come when Dutch New Guinea will return to our fold, because its return is a claim of our national aspirations which cannot be blocked and hindered or crushed..... This is a national task for us that cannot be evaded, because*

we have pledged that we will fight till the end of the time as long as one part of our country is not free..... It is a question of colonisation or non-colonisation, of colonialism or independence. Part of our country is still colonised by the Dutch and we do not accept this. We want the whole territory of our country to be free without exception."

Could we not use the same words with regard to the Foreign Possessions with their colonial rule on our soil ? Do they not belong to us, to quote Dr. Soekarno again, "not tomorrow, not the day after tomorrow, but *now*—at this very moment" ?

We did not fight for the freedom of only that part of India which was under the British. It is our duty, now that we are free of the British, to liberate the rest of our territory which is still under French and Portuguese rule and to help our brethren there to be free like ourselves.

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And God willing, we shall discharge that duty.

APPENDIX

THE FUTURE OF FRENCH INDIA

RUSSEL H. FIFIELD

We reproduce the following article from the "Far Eastern Survey" as a contribution from one who can view the problem from a completely detached angle. The author Mr. Fifield, is Associate Professor of Political Science at the University of Michigan.

In an address to the Indian Parliament on 11th February 1949, Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru stated: "We believe that for a variety of reasons it is natural and proper that all Foreign Possessions in India should be united with India. We propose to give effect to this policy through friendly discussions with the powers concerned." This statement expressed the official attitude of the Indian government toward the small French and Portuguese Possessions scattered over the territory of the newly independent nation. With the emergence of India as a sovereign state within the British Commonwealth, many Indians had assumed that France would relinquish her possessions at an early date. Nevertheless, she has been rather slow in approaching the problem.

Under present conditions these Possessions contribute little to the economic welfare of their mother country.

Ninety-nine

Although Pondicherry is located on the east coast, it is by no means an important economic outpost of India comparable to the British crown colony of HongKong on the coast of China. The chief reason behind the efforts of France and Portugal to retain their Settlements in India appears to be national prestige. The bulk of the population of the Settlements, however, is Indian and the magnet of an independent India is strong.

The French areas concerned in current negotiations between New Delhi and Paris are remnants of the former French empire in India. These settlements—Pondicherry, Chandernagore, Yanam, Karikal and Mahe—total only 196 square miles. All of them have coastal locations except Chandernagore, a suburb of Calcutta and completely surrounded by Indian territory. The total population of French India in 1948 was 332,045, less than 2,000 of whom were European French. Pondicherry had a population of 222,572, Chandernagore 44,786, Karikal 40,541, Mahe 18,293 and Yanam 5,853. The colonies are dependent upon India for food, coal and cotton.

Pondicherry, located on the east coast 122 miles south of Madras, is the capital and most important Settlement of French India. Founded by the French in 1674 and finally restored to them in 1814, it knew both Dutch and British rule in the course of colonial wars. After its final return to the French its suburbs were divided into enclaves in order to leave strategic areas in British control.

All the Settlements of French India now have elected Municipal Councils. French India is part of the French

Union and sends one representative to the Assembly of the French Union, two to the Council of the Republic, and one to the National Assembly in Paris. In view of possible territorial changes in French India, Article 27 of the new French Constitution is significant. According to this article, treaties "that involve the cession, exchange or addition of territories shall not become final until they have been ratified by a legislative act" and "no cession, no exchange and no addition of territory shall be valid without the consent of the populations concerned."

Negotiations between the French and Indian Governments over the future of French India have been prolonged and often stormy. After discussions between the two Governments in New Delhi, a declaration was made in the National Assembly of France on 8th June 1948 setting forth the principles along which the peoples of French India would determine their future. This declaration stated that "their decision will be taken by means of free and sincere consultation, the particulars of which will be fixed in agreement with the elected Municipal Councils of each of these Establishments and at a date which will be fixed according to their indications. The results of this consultation will hold good for each of the five Establishments separately and not globally for the whole."

The French Ambassador in New Delhi wrote to Prime Minister Nehru on 29th June 1948 that

The date of the consultation will be fixed for Chandernagore by the Municipal Assembly of the Free Town ; for the four other Establishments by their Municipal Councils grouped in one single assembly. To

this end these Municipal Assemblies will be entirely renewed and new elections will be held at dates to be fixed as soon as possible.

Prime Minister Nehru replied to the Ambassador on the same day that

My Government note with satisfaction that the principles embodied in the Declaration (made in the French National Assembly on 8th June 1948) are in agreement with their view that the future of French the Establishments in India should be determined at the earliest opportunity in accordance with the freely expressed desire of their inhabitants.....My Government cordially share the French Government's desire that the referendum by which the people of French India are to be consulted should be held in an atmosphere free from passion or hatred and without application of internal or external pressure.

Municipal elections were scheduled for 24th October 1948, in Pondicherry, Mahe, Yanam and Karikal in accordance with the general Indian-French agreement on the future of the Settlements. Before the elections the French refused a request from the New Delhi Government that Indian Observers be stationed in the Municipalities, but assured the Indian Government that the French authorities were ordered to maintain "complete neutrality." Rioting broke out in Mahe on October 22 and the French temporarily lost control of the city. The French Commissioner attributed the rioting to the "external pressure" of the Indian Congress Party. The Indian authorities, however, denied that their nationals participated in the disturbance. Because municipal records were destroyed in

Mahe, voting was temporarily postponed in that colony ; but elections in Pondicherry, Yanam and Karikal were held as planned. Pro-French candidates of the Socialist Party won majorities in the voting in all these Establishments. Dr. P. Subbarayan, Indian Congress Party leader, called the election "highly undemocratic."

On 21st March 1949, the elected Municipal Councils of Pondicherry, Yanam, Karikal and Mahe met in Pondicherry and unanimously agreed that a referendum should be held on December 11 to determine the future sovereignty of the Establishments. It was agreed that if they voted to change their allegiance they must have a guarantee of "complete autonomy" for a thirty-year transitional period.

A few days later the wartime Customs Union between India and the French Settlements came to an end and a permit system replaced the once unrestricted travel between India and the French colonies. Under the previous agreement French India had been exempted from the export and import regulations in force in India against foreign states ; customs duties on imports into and exports from French India to countries other than India were collected by the Indian Government, in exchange for which French India received 195,000 dollars annually. But beginning 1st April 1949, a custom cordon was placed around French India, the establishments paid the regular Indian duties, the free transit of goods ended and no subsidy was paid by the Indian Government. The economic dependence of French India upon India proper became a weapon for the New Delhi Government. India claimed that she was willing to continue the former customs agreement for a short time but that she could not accept certain modifications

desired by the French. As a special gesture, food was exempted from the new customs control.

After French charges of an economic blockade, Mr. P. A. Menon, Joint Secretary of the Ministry of External Affairs, visited Pondicherry to review the economic situation. He reported on June 6 that the difficulties imposed by the new customs regulations had been exaggerated, but he recommended certain changes. Under the new arrangements, accepted by the Indian Government on June 11, all goods going to Pondicherry and Karikal for which contracts had been made before April 1 were exempted from the new regulations ; goods moving between the enclaves of Pondicherry were exempted from import and export regulations and customs duties subject only to minor safeguards ; goods in transit between Pondicherry and Karikal by rail were exempted from customs duties and import and export regulations if under a customs seal ; and no identity certificates were necessary for persons travelling between the enclaves of Pondicherry. The French Commissioner said he was pleased with the relaxation of controls.

The customs controversy was related to the decision of the French government in May 1949 to ask Dr. Jose G. Guerrero, Vice-President of the International Court of Justice, to name neutral Observers for the plebiscites in French India. Dr. Guerrero agreed to act in his personal capacity, apparently following a precedent set by one of the officers of the court who appointed Observers for the post-war plebiscite held in certain Italian Alpine areas. Dr. Guerrero was to name six Observers and six alternates, but two men, Holger Andersen of Denmark and Rudolfo B.

Hundred-four

Castro of El Salvador, were selected to go immediately to French India to investigate charges that Indian economic pressure might make the plebiscite unfair. Although a French diplomat in New Delhi claimed that France was under no obligation to inform India of every step preliminary to the referendum, or even to have neutral Observers present, it was announced that India had been informed of these steps.

On May 30, however, a spokesman for the Indian Ministry of External Affairs stated that the results of the plebiscites might be disregarded by India if they were held under unacceptable conditions. He accused the French of violating the June 1948 agreement on such conditions, of neglecting to answer Indian requests for information, and of accepting two neutral Observers without consulting India on their appointments. He went so far as to state that an adverse vote now in the Establishments "would not mean that the subject is closed forever." At the same time he declared that the French Settlements voting to join India would not be merged with any neighbouring province contrary to public desire and that India was willing that they should remain autonomous for some time.

Four days later another Indian Government spokesman attacked the idea that the future of the French Settlements was a purely domestic matter for France. He asserted that the earlier agreement between Paris and New Delhi on the subject of the plebiscite made such a concept "untenable." Indian circles charged that the Observers appointed by the Vice-President of the International Court had received "totally extraneous functions to perform which have nothing to do with the referendum." It was

also stated that appointing plebiscite Observers was not part of the defined functions of the International Court.

Later in June 1949, New Delhi and Paris reached a compromise on certain aspects of the controversy. As already noted, India took steps to modify the customs regulations that had allegedly caused economic hardship to the French Settlements. France, for her part, agreed that the names of twelve persons selected by Dr. Guerrero to serve as Observers would be submitted to India for consideration, and that the Paris and New Delhi Governments would jointly choose six. As the plebiscite in Chandernagore had been set for June 19, the two Observers already selected at the request of France would observe the voting in that Municipality.

Municipal elections in Chandernagore in September 1948 had installed a strongly pro-Indian government. In April 1949 the Municipal Assembly of the enclave declared in favour of merger with India considering a referendum unnecessary. The French rejected this procedure and Chandernagore opposed a French suggestion that the referendum be postponed to December. Shortly before June 19, when the referendum was scheduled, the Municipal Assembly of the enclave sent a telegram to the President of France expressing "apprehension that the forthcoming referendum on the future of the town may not be free and fair" but the plebiscite would be held anyway "under protest." The decision to join India was definite—7,463 to 114. Voting conditions were quiet; the local police force was strengthened by a contingent from Pondicherry, and police pickets were stationed by the West Bengal Government at the entrances to the locality.

On 14th August 1949, the second anniversary of the independence of India, France transferred Chandernagore on a *de facto* basis to the Union of India. *De jure* sovereignty, of course, awaited a treaty between France and India. Prime Minister Nehru's message to Chandernagore was significant. He welcomed the people of the Settlement "as partners in the disciplined liberty of a great country and in the great tasks that confront us" and he stated that the process of change in the municipality was "made inevitable by reasons of history, geography, culture and the spirit of the times."

The referendum decisions to be made by the other French Settlements in India are by no means certain. They are not landlocked as in Chandernagore, and the Socialist Party operating in them has close ties with France. Considering this situation, the French Ambassador to India on 31st July 1949 made an "unofficial" suggestion that France and India "might jointly guarantee the autonomy of the new state (French India) which would have a connection with the French as well as Indian Union and have representatives both in the Paris and New Delhi assemblies." Under such an agreement, the Ambassador said, it was "immaterial to the French government whether the referendum shall take place or not." It is important to note in this connection that France has already offered Pondicherry the status of an Associated State, having "free autonomy" in the French Union. India, however, did not approve of the solution presented by the French Ambassador.

The referendum date for the rest of French India, originally set for 11th December 1949, was afterward

postponed until 15th February 1950. India announced that she was willing to accept the postponement provided it facilitated the working out of a satisfactory referendum procedure with the Paris Government. Since that time further difficulties have arisen and the future of the four Settlements remain undetermined to date.

It is problematical whether or not in the long run, the economic status of the Indians of French India would be better under the New Delhi regime. The answer would be closely related to the economic development of India and to the colonial policies of Paris. But the emergence of India as an independent state of major proportions in Southern Asia is certain to eclipse the old outposts of European empire. Sooner or later the remnants of empire in the subcontinent will be absorbed by their great neighbour. The world can only hope that the process will work by negotiation and not by force.

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